

Edited by
Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore

Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism



FICHTE
STUDIEN

Supplementa

Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism

Fichte-Studien-Supplementa

Band 24

im Auftrage der
Internationalen Johann-Gottlieb-Fichte-Gesellschaft

in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Istituto Italiano
per gli Studi Filosofici

herausgegeben von

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**Edited by
Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore**

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Amsterdam - New York, NY 2010

Fichte-Studien-Supplementa

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Nr:223193

1-G33-I1803-B

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von; 1749-1832. - "Weimar 1803" (Goethe, middle, with the Humboldt brothers, Wieland, Niebuhr, Schleiermacher, Herder, Gauss, W. von Schlegel, Iffland, Schiller, Klinger, Tieck, Jean Paul, Pestalozzi etc.

Print, later colouring, after the painting, 1884, by Otto Knille (1832-98), form. Berlin, Universitaetsbibliothek.

Typographie und Satz: Christoph Asmuth (Berlin)

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of "ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents - Requirements for permanence".

ISBN-13: 978-90-420-3011-4

E-Book ISBN: 978-90-420-3012-1

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Printed in The Netherlands

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Introduction

Daniel Breazeale

All of the papers collected in this volume are revised versions of ones originally presented at the Seventh Biennial Meeting of the North American Fichte Society, which was held on the campus of St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in April of 2004. The announced theme of this event was »Fichte and German Idealism,« though the latter term was construed very broadly, to included not simply Schelling, Hegel and the other post-Kantian »idealists,« but also Kant himself, as well as »romantic« thinkers such as Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), Hölderlin, Friedrich Schlegel, and Wilhelm von Humboldt.

One of the purposes of this event was to *expand* the concept of German idealism and of Fichte's relationship to the same. Rather than viewing Fichte's philosophy simply as an important rung on the presumptive ladder »from Kant to Hegel« and viewing German idealism (in the manner of Hegel) as a unidirectional process of development toward a pre-ordained goal, participants in this conference tried to look at German idealism as a complex constellation of systems, projects, critiques, and proposals, within which one can identify multiply strands and paths of actual and possible development. When viewed in this way, the seminal role of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* becomes even more evident than before, and the influence of the same is revealed to be far broader than is often appreciated.

A second purpose of this event was to situate Fichte's own philosophy more securely in the context of his own era by relating it to certain other intellectual movements and philosophies of the period. Though few philosophical authors have show themselves to be capable of greater abstraction in presenting their ideas than Fichte, these ideas did not arise in a vacuum. On the contrary, as the papers in this volume eloquently demonstrate, they arose in and through a process of vigorous dialogue with the ideas of oth-

er philosophers, whose own ideas were, in turn, profoundly influenced by those of Fichte.

In addition to showing that German idealism was far from being the sort of monolithic or unidirectional philosophical movement that it has long been characterized as being and in addition to showing how a consideration of the actual context within which Fichte developed and presented his own, profoundly original philosophical system can enrich one's understanding of the contents of the latter, this event also had the explicit goal of expanding the concept of German idealism to include writers and thinkers not always recognized – particularly by Anglophone scholars – as part of this same constellation. Whereas earlier generations of historians of philosophy tended to ignore or at least to downplay the connections between German idealism and early German romanticism, recent scholarship has tended to focus on the many internal connections between these two movements of thought in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and, here again, as the papers contained in the final portion of volume demonstrate, Fichte is an absolutely central and mediating figure.

Part One of this volume consists of four essays examining the relationship between various aspects of the philosophies of Kant and Fichte. Tom Rockmore's contribution, »Fichte, German Idealism and the Thing in Itself,« re-examines how Fichte reworked the Kantian concept of the thing in itself in a manner that transformed his theory of knowledge and broke decisively with orthodox Kantianism.

In »Fichte and the Problem of Logic: Positioning the *Wissenschaftslehre* in the Development of German Idealism,« Nectarious Limnatis emphasizes Fichte's methodological innovations with respect to the relationship between formal logic and philosophy, innovations that anticipate many ideas and themes usually attributed to Schelling and to Hegel: such as contradiction, circularity, totality, the historicity of cognition, and practical nature of consciousness.

Methodological issues are also the focus of Daniel Breazeale's »Doing Philosophy: Fichte vs. Kant on Transcendental Method,« which contrasts Kant's somewhat equivocal conception of the proper method of transcendental philosophy with Fichte's »phenomenological« conception of the same and examines some of the advantages and disadvantages of each philosopher's methodology. Breazeale's essay also includes a detailed discussion of Fichte's conception of the »synthetic« method of philosophiz-

ing and the relationship of the same to the method of pure geometry. A rather different sort of contrast between Kant and Fichte is explored in Giorgia Cecchinato's »Form and Colour in Kant's and Fichte's Theory of Beauty,« which compares the conception of the beauty of form and color found in Kant's third *Critique* with Fichte's remarks on the same topic in his unpublished manuscript of 1793/94, »Practical Philosophy,« and uses this contrast to demonstrate the originality of Fichte's aesthetics.

The essays in *Part Two* are all concerned with specific innovations incorporated into the various versions of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. Steven Hoeltzel's »Critical Epistemology and Idealist Metaphysics in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–1800)« rejects both the purely »epistemological« (or transcendental) and the traditional »metaphysical« interpretations of the early *Wissenschaftslehre* and argues for a new, intermediate interpretation of Fichte's idealism, according to which what truly exists is a plurality of entities, all of which are instances of spontaneously self-articulating, elementally aspiring intelligence (i.e., rational beings or states thereof). Whereas Hoeltzel focuses on the early *Wissenschaftslehre*, Ulrich Schlösser's »Presuppositions of Knowledge versus Immediate Certainty of Being: Fichte's 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* as a Critique of Knowledge and a Program of Philosophical Foundation« focuses upon one of the later version of the same and shows how Fichte, in his second set of lectures on *Wissenschaftslehre* from 1804, reacted against his own earlier attempt to ground philosophy purely on the free self-consciousness of a subject and turned instead to a ground outside of consciousness. Schlösser examines how Fichte struggled with the problem of representing in knowledge the claim that the subject is bound to something that is absolutely and in every respect elusive and then demonstrates how this struggle led him to a the discovery of radically new conception of knowledge, one embracing both conceptual and experiential elements.

The indispensable role of empirical experience for determining the truth of transcendental philosophy is the theme of F. Scott Scribner's »Falsification: On the Role of the Empirical in J. G. Fichte's Transcendental Method,« which emphasizes the importance within Fichte's transcendental philosophy of preserving the possibility empirical falsification of the same. In her essay »The Self as the World Into Itself. Towards Fichte's Conception of Subjectivity,« Marina Bykova provides a discussion, focusing upon the early *Wissenschaftslehre*, of Fichte's pioneering account of »self-pres-

ence.« In detailed discussion of Fichte's early theory of selfhood, Bykova emphasizes the fact that the Fichtean self is not an isolated individual, but is inevitably engaged in the world in a practical and necessarily intersubjective manner.

The three essays in *Part Three* examine the relationship between the thought of Fichte and Schelling. The controversial relationship between Fichte and the very early Schelling is the subject of Richard Fincham's »Schelling's Subversion of Fichtean Monism, 1794–1796.« Fincham argues that the dissolution of Schelling's initial discipleship can, to a large extent, be explained by considering criticisms of the first exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* found within the writings of Schelling's then friend, Friedrich Hölderlin, and the man whom Hölderlin considered to be his »philosophical mentor,« Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. Yolanda Estes takes up the controversial topic of »intellectual intuition« and offers a reexamination of the alleged »continuity« between Kant's, Fichte's, and Schelling's conceptions of the same. In her paper, »Intellectual Intuition: Reconsidering Continuity in Kant, Fichte, and Schelling,« Estes points to both similarities and differences between these competing conceptions of intellectual intuition, while at the same challenging Moltke S. Gram's influential rejection of the »continuity thesis.« George Seidel's »From Idealism to Romanticism and Leibniz' Logic« considers the sense in which the *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794/95 appears to have not one but two absolutes: an absolute self and an absolute non-self, each absolutely opposed to the other. Seidel compares Fichte's »solution« to this apparent problem with that of Schelling and argues that both solutions actually derive from Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles.

The essays in *Part Four* are all concerned with much-discussed relationship between Fichte and Hegel. Angelica Nuzzo's »Fichte's Transcendental Logic of 1812 – Between Kant and Hegel« focuses upon the relationship between formal and transcendental logic and examines Fichte's conception of this relationship as expressed in his late lectures on this topic. She argues that Fichte's conception of the nature of transcendental logic is, by this point, very different from Kant's and is in many respects similar to the view of the same developed by Hegel's in his *Science of Logic*.

Fichte's conception of right or law (*Recht*) and the role of coercion therein is the topic of C. Jeffery Kinlaw's, »Practical Rationality and Natur-

al Right: Fichte and Hegel on Self-Conception Within a Relation of Natural Right,« in which Kinlaw responds vigorously to recent criticisms of Fichte's philosophy of right by such admirers of Hegel as Ludwig Siep and Robert Williams. In her »Political Realism in Idealism: Fichte versus Hegel and their Different Versions of the Foundation of Right,« Virginia López-Domínguez engages in a detailed examination of the important differences between Fichte's and Hegel's conceptions of the relationship between right and morality, differences which she illustrates and explains with reference to the writings of Kant, Herder, Schiller, Fries, and others. She concludes that the inadequacies of both Fichte's and Hegel's conceptions of right are rooted in their failure to appreciate the role of production in mediating between the realms of spirit and nature. The contrast between Fichte's theory of mutual recognition and Hegel's notion of the life and death struggle for recognition is the theme of Arnold Farr's »Fichte's Master/Slave Dialectic: The Untold Story,« which argues that there is in fact a tacit master/slave dialectic in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, one that is as profound and interesting as Hegel's and may be more relevant than the latter to contemporary social and political struggles.

In his essay, »Fichte, Hegel, and the Senses of ›Revelation,« Anthony Perovich challenges Emil Fackenheim's well-known claim that Fichte and Hegel were able to comprehend Christianity only by either ignoring or denying its claims to revealed status. Perovich not only defends both thinkers from this criticism, but also argues that there are remarkable similarities between Fichte's and Hegel's views of revelation, though Fichte's view is the more forward-looking of the two. Matthew Altman, in his »Fichte's Anti-Hegelian Legacy,« maintains that according to Fichte's account of subjectivity the nonrational is at the heart of human consciousness, and thus he claims that Fichte directly challenges the Hegelian thesis that rational self-sufficiency is capable of providing a complete account of finite subjectivity, thereby foreshadowing the Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean dissatisfaction with a certain kind of idealism, and particularly with the Hegelian enterprise and anticipating certain themes that currently dominate Continental thought.

Part Five includes a number of essays discussing Fichte's influence on the disparate thinkers associated with the first phase of German romanticism. The relationship of Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) to Fichte is the subject of Michael Vater's »›Philosophy on the Track of Freedom‹ or ›Sys-

tematizing Systemlessness: Novalis's Reflections on the *Wissenschaftslehre*, 1795–1796.« Vater offers an interpretation of Novalis's *Fichte Studies* that stresses the continuity between the latter and the early *Wissenschaftslehre* and shows how Novalis independently arrived at some of the same conclusions that Fichte himself would reach a year later in his lectures on *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, where the initial postulation of an abstract self-reverting activity as a support for self-consciousness ends in the dispersed world of plural centers of consciousness as will, each a sensibly embodied I summoned to free action within social constraints. Violetta Waibel, in her ambitious essay, »With Respect to the Antinomies, Fichte has a Remarkable Idea.« Three Answers to Kant and Fichte – Hardenberg, Hölderlin, Hegel,« examines how Novalis, Hölderlin, and Hegel each tried to connect Kant's notion of the antinomial dialectic of reason to the Fichtean concepts of interdetermination [*Wechselbestimmung*] and oscillation [*Schweben*], which are central to the 1794/95 *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*. She concludes with an outline of the methodological differences between Kant and Fichte's approaches to the antinomies and then discusses how these approaches were, in turn, transformed by Novalis, Hölderlin, and Hegel.

Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert's »Forgetfulness and Foundationalism: Schlegel's Critique of Fichte's Idealism« sharply contrasts Friedrich Schlegel's entire philosophical project with that of Fichte and argues that Schlegel's real aim was to move philosophy away from its moorings in science and to bring it into the company of art and history. This required him to endorse a progressive and never-ending method for philosophy, thereby replacing all attempts to ground philosophy upon any Absolute with an infinite search or longing for the infinite (the totality of all truths). Schlegel is also the subject of

Bärbel Frischmann's »Friedrich Schlegel's Transformation of Fichte's Transcendental into an Early Romantic Idealism« also examines the relationship between Fichte and Schlegel, but unlike Millán-Zaibert, Frischmann emphasizes the continuity between Fichte's version of transcendental idealism and the philosophy of the early romantics, as exemplified in the writings of Schlegel.

The last two essays are devoted to Wilhelm von Humboldt. David Kenosian's »Sound Reasoning: Fichtean Elements in Wilhelm von Humboldt's Philosophy of Language« traces the Fichtean influence upon Humboldt's well-known philosophy of language and argues that the latter

provided Humboldt with a distinctively »Fichtean« solution to the dualism he found in Kant. Claude Piché essay, »Fichte, Schleiermacher and W. von Humboldt on the Foundation of the University of Berlin,« examines the confrontation, in the fall of 1810, between Fichte, Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt regarding the character, purpose, and function of the new Prussian university in Berlin. In doing so, Piché discusses the historical circumstances and the intellectual climate in which this confrontation took place, contrasts Fichte's and Humboldt's views of the vocation of man in society, and examines the pedagogical consequences of these differing views.

It is our hope that this collection of essays will succeed in its dual goal of demonstrating the broad influence of Fichte's thought for the subsequent histories of the idealist and romantic movements and of showing how some of central features of Fichte's own philosophy can be illuminated by more closely considering the relationship of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to some of the leading intellectual movements of its own era. In addition, the publication of this volume may also provide evidence of the ever-growing sophistication of English language Fichte studies and of role of the North American Fichte Society in the promotion of the same.

Fichte, German Idealism and the Thing in Itself

Tom Rockmore

This paper will consider Fichte's contribution to theory of knowledge in respect to the vexed Kantian concept of the thing in itself. I will be assuming that for Kant, to know the thing in itself is to know reality, and that not to know it is not to know reality, where by »reality« is meant the mind-independent external world, in short, to use current jargon, the way the world really is. This problem is central to Kant's critical philosophy, to post-Kantian German idealism, and to theory of knowledge of any kind. I will be arguing that Kant's theory of knowledge is ambiguous, that despite his orthodox intentions Fichte's reworking of this concept drives a wedge between himself and Kant, and that in virtue of his reworking of the concept he is on the right track with respect to theory of knowledge.

1. The thing in itself and realism

The term »thing in itself« and its near synonyms occur in Kant and other modern thinkers as a way of referring to mind-independent reality as an object of knowledge. Theory of knowledge routinely makes claims about knowledge of reality, but not always about reality understood in this way. Kant invokes the term »thing in itself« to refer to the real, or what is as it is in the epistemological context. Variants of the claim to know the real not only as it might appear but as it really is arise very early in the Western tradition and continue unabated in the contemporary discussion. Parmenides, the author of the first recognizably modern view of knowledge, already distinguishes between the way of truth, which grasps what is, or being, and the way of illusion. Distantly following Parmenides, Plato suggests that on grounds of nature and nurture some exceptional individuals

are literally capable of »seeing« the real. The idea that to know is to know mind-independent reality continues unabated throughout the entire Western philosophical tradition, and is still popular today.

Though the problem of knowledge runs throughout the entire Western philosophical tradition, there is not now and never has been any agreement on what it might mean to know reality. There is arguably as much disagreement now after two and a half millenia as there was in the time of early Greek philosophy about reality, hence about the relation of claims to know to the way the world is. Observers continue to disagree in favoring different, often incompatible conceptions of reality.

In the guise of different views of reality versions of the thing in itself are mentioned by Hobbes, Jacobi and Liebmann among very many others. Notoriously, Hobbes is a materialist, who explains everything concerning human psychology in terms of motions in the body. Sensation is the effect of which things in themselves are the causes. In chapter II of his work on *Human Nature*, Hobbes addresses »The Cause of Sense« in suggesting a version of the causal view of perception in which independent things cause us to have ideas of them. »Originally,« he writes, »all conceptions proceed from the actions of the thing itself, whereof it is the conception. Now when the action is present, the conception it produceth is called SENSE, and the thing by whose action the same is produced is called the OBJECT of sense.«¹

It is conceivable that Hobbes, who precedes Kant, and who understands things in themselves as parts of the mind-independent external world, influenced the formulation of the critical philosophy. Jacobi, who follows Kant, is an opponent, not an admirer, of the critical philosophy. A philosopher of feeling and faith, who was important in moving German philosophy toward Romanticism, Jacobi thinks that the thing in itself is incompatible with the critical philosophy and leads to nihilism. He interprets the Kantian position as pure subjective idealism, in which the object is no more than a series of subjective presentations, for which there cannot be any objective, independently-existing reality. He famously rejects the concept of the thing in itself through the slogan: »Without the thing in itself I cannot enter the Kantian philosophy, and with it I cannot remain.«²

1 Thomas Hobbes, *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 22–23.

2 Jacobi, *Werke*, II, p. 304.

Otto Liebmann, the German neo-Kantian, was a central figure in the post-Hegelian return to Kant in the middle 1860s. In Liebmann's famous book, *Kant und die Epigonen* (1865), every chapter ends with the slogan, »Also muss auf Kant zurückgegangen werden!« Liebmann, who denied any reality other than experience, was a firm supporter of Kant but critical of the thing in itself. He objects to Kant's inconsistent handling of the thing in itself as no more than the problematic substratum of existence but also as necessary and certain. According to Liebmann, all the major post-Kantians (Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel) continue Kant's own hypostatization of the thing in itself.

At stake in all three thinkers is the problem of how to understand reality as the object of knowledge. Hobbes, who is a pre-critical thinker, believes in a direct correlation between what is present to mind, which is an effect, and its cause in a mind-independent object. Since he merely asserts but does not demonstrate his claim, for a Kantian Hobbes is only a dogmatic thinker. Writing in Kant's wake, Jacobi and Liebmann object to cognitive claims concerning a mind-independent reality. Jacobi, the anti-Kantian, thinks that reality can only be known through faith, and that within the critical philosophy no cognitive claims can nor need be made about it. For the Kantian Liebmann, it is a mistake to hypostatize the concept of the thing in itself.

2. *Kant, the thing in itself, and knowledge of reality*

The variety of responses to Kant's view of reality as the thing in itself is partially due to the obscurity of Kant's description of this concept. In Kant's time, it was widely thought, in part because of Kant's repeated efforts to refute those he charges with denying the existence of the external world (e. g. Descartes and Berkeley), that »thing in itself« referred to what, in contemporary language, can be designated as the mind-independent external world. In questioning Kant's concept of the thing in itself, the post-Kantians raise questions about the object of knowledge and its relation to reality.

Views of reality and knowledge are closely linked. In the Western tradition, the most common view of knowledge is that when we know we know what is as it is, or the way the world is. Versions of this view run through the Western tradition from Parmenides and Plato through Descartes to

contemporary analytic philosophy. This approach, which is still widely defended in contemporary analytic philosophy,³ can be briefly paraphrased as a series of bald, unargued assertions. By »reality« is meant the mind-independent external world, or what is as it is, which is supposedly independent of what anyone thinks about it. The problem of knowledge consists in knowing the world as it is in independence of us. And under the proper conditions, we do know the world as it is in itself.

This kind of scenario makes good sense at least intuitively, but less sense philosophically. It seems unproblematic to say there is a world, and there is a way that the world is. It is harder to say how one can reliably claim to know it, not merely as it appears, but as it is. Kant, who was aware of this difficulty, claims that in mathematics, natural science and the future science of metaphysics, where »metaphysics« is understood as referring not to ontology but to epistemology, we do have reliable knowledge and that in a sense such knowledge concerns the world. But what is it we know when we know? What world can we reliably claim to know?

Kant, who is inconsistent on this basic level – he provides at least two different responses to the nature of the real understood as the cognitive object – favors what I will be calling representationalism as well as what I will be calling constructivism. Representationalism is a strategy for knowledge according to which our access to the object is not direct, but indirect, mediated through a representation of the mind-independent cognitive object. For a representationalist there is knowledge of the mind-independent world as it is. Constructivism is a rival epistemological approach according to which there is no possibility of knowing a mind-independent cognitive object. According to constructivism, the human subject knows only those objects we ourselves construct as a condition of knowing them.

Representationalism and constructivism are incompatible. Representationalism asserts indirect, or mediated knowledge of an independent object that constructivism denies can be known. Representationalists routinely favor a strong, metaphysical form of realism. There are many different varieties of realism. The term »metaphysical realism« refers to a claim to know the mind-independent real as it is in itself. The term »empirical realism« refers to the claim to know the world only as it occurs

3 For a recent statement of this view, see Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

within experience. The term »scientific realism«⁴ refers to the increasingly popular view, associated with scientism, represented by Sellars and others,⁵ that science is the only reliable source of knowledge.⁶ Scientific realism can be construed in different ways, for instance as claiming or not claiming to discover the metaphysically real. Whereas a metaphysical realist lays claim to know the way the world really is, an empirical realist claims nothing further than a grasp of the phenomenal contents of experience.

Direct realism, which asserts the object is known directly as it is, is widely thought to be defeated by problems of illusion and delusion. Kant denies direct realism in favoring a form of representational realism in which claims to know are indexed to a categorial framework. Representational realism, which holds that knowledge consists in correctly inferring from a representation to what it represents, is widely current in the modern period, for instance in the new way of ideas – a term invented by Bishop Stillingfleet to refer to Locke, as opposed to Platonism, or the old way of ideas – broadly understood as including rationalists like Descartes and empiricists like Locke.

Kant, who poses the problem of knowledge in representationalist terms, provides representationalist as well as constructivist solutions for it. In the famous Herz letter (21 July 1772) early in the so-called critical period, Kant describes the problem of knowledge as demanding an analysis of the relation of the representation to the object.⁷ If the object is independent of the subject, then the representation is not only a phenomenon but also an appearance that refers to a mind-independent external object. The obvious difficulty lies in describing the relation of the phenomenon, understood as an appearance, to an independent world.

4 For a recent discussion, see Stathis Psillos, »The Present State of the Scientific Realism Debate,« in *British Journal of the Philosophy of Science*, volume 51 (2000), pp. 705–728.

5 See »Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man,« in Wilfrid Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, pp. 1–41.

6 For a critical discussion of scientism, see Joseph Margolis, *The Unraveling of Scientism: American Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

7 See »Letter to Herz of 21 July 1772,« in Immanuel Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759–99*, edited and translated by Arnulf Zweig, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967, p. 71.

Kant's embarrassment in this respect is well known. He designates the world, or the cognitive object, through the term »thing in itself« in which the real can be considered as the cause and sensation as its effect. In reference to the phenomenal object, he writes: »[O]ne can consider the causality of this being in two aspects, as intelligible in its action as a thing in itself, and as sensible in the effects of that action as an appearance in the world of sense.«⁸ Kant's suggestion that phenomena are appearances referring beyond themselves to the world that causes us to have experience of them is a form of what is now known as the causal view of perception. The difficulty with this position, which, depending on how it is interpreted, is not very different, say, from Hobbes' view, lies in showing, in a word, that representations represent, or, more generally, in demonstrating the cognitive link between phenomena and reality.

Kant, who was aware of this difficulty, also rejects the representational approach he espouses as part of his so-called Copernican revolution in philosophy. In abandoning any form of representationalism, as well as the very effort to cognize mind-independent reality, hence the concept of the thing in itself interpreted as relating to the way the world is, he argues that we know only what we construct. In denying that we uncover, discover or find what we know, he suggests, like Hobbes, Vico and other constructivists, that the identity between the subject that knows and the object known depends on the fact that the subject constructs its object that, for this reason, is transparent to mind. This is the meaning of the famous reference to modern science whose success resides in grasping that »reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to itself produces according to its own design.«⁹

Many other passages could be cited and many interesting things could be said about Kant's Copernican revolution. For present purposes, it will be sufficient to note that Kant's two views of knowledge are incompatible. The difference between a theory of knowledge based on finding, discovering or uncovering the cognitive object and one based on constructing it is about as basic as it gets. In suggesting that we do not know reality as it is, but only as we construct it, Kant breaks with the basic thrust of the new way of ideas in proposing a very different constructivist approach. Suffice

8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allan Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, B 566, p. 535.

9 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xiii, p. 109.

it to say that this approach excludes any epistemological appeal to thing in themselves, which immediately become superfluous, and solves the epistemological problem in proposing not a representationalist but a constructivist solution.

3. *Fichte's exoteric view of the thing in itself*

It is not my purpose here to decide the vexed question of the correct reading of Kant's concept of the thing in itself. The controversy concerning the proper understanding of this concept, which already began in Kant's time, is long, complex, and indecisive. This debate, which has never been decided, continues in our time. Allison denies the so-called standard picture in which a transcendental object causally affects the cognitive subject – a view parenthetically close to Hobbe's position – in favor of the claim that Kant invokes a priori conditions of what can count as an object for a human being.¹⁰ Höffe, who sees Kant as reversing the idea that true being is only grasped through liberation from the senses, suggests that the term »thing in itself« is much misunderstood and simply means »a limiting concept.«¹¹

Suffice it to say that in reacting to the critical philosophy, Kant's successors thought they were confronted with a choice between two very different approaches to epistemology as concerning, if not knowledge of reality, at least as referring to it through appearances, or as concerning no more than the empirical world, but not mind-independent reality, hence not the thing in itself as it apparently figures in the critical philosophy.

As Fichte was beginning to write, the debate about the thing in itself was still raging. Fichte, who was aware of this debate, addresses the concept of the thing in itself in a number of places. Fichte's reading of this concept is difficult to understand since it is inconsistent – he says different things in texts intended for the public and in texts intended for colleagues – and changes radically around the time he left Jena. Depending on which

10 See Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

11 See Otfried Höffe, *Immanuel Kant*, translated by Marshall Farrier, Albany: SUNY Press, 1994, p. 106.

text one has in mind, one arrives at a very different understanding of his position.

As concerns the concept of the thing in itself in his early Jena writings, to which I will limit myself here, there are distinct exoteric and esoteric views. In texts intended for the public, Fichte somewhat stridently rejects this concept as part of his claim to be the only one to get Kant right. Yet in more technical writings, such as the first version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, he reinterprets this same concept in situating it at the basis of any successful philosophical position. In § 4 of the *First Introduction* (1797), he takes the position that the thing in itself is a mere dogmatic concept, produced by thought alone, a pure invention without any reality, but that every philosophy necessarily refers to objects outside experience.

Fichte here rejects this concept on the basis of the distinction between objects of experience and objects in themselves, where experience is defined as thinking accompanied by the feeling of necessity. In other words, Fichte is distinguishing between what is given to us and by which we are constrained and what we freely think up. In locating the thing in itself in the latter category, he in effect accuses Kant of uncritically going beyond the limits of experience he himself fixed for the critical philosophy. Any attempt, including Kant's, to ground philosophy in an indemonstrable object goes beyond the limits of critical thinking in falling into dogmatism.

The moral of this view is that the thing in itself is no more than a dogmatic concept invoked to ground philosophy that cannot be grounded. Fichte develops this idea in the *Second Introduction*, where he contrasts Kant's denial of intellectual intuition as forbidding any claim to immediate consciousness of the thing in itself with his own claim that since all existence is given in experience, there is no need to appeal to a thing in itself.¹²

The *Second Introduction* innovates with respect to the *First Introduction* in taking a position on the ongoing debate about the thing in itself. Fichte here claims that Kant does not base his position on the thing in itself. His further claim that only Jacobi among contemporary Kant interpreters has a reasonable grasp of the problem commits him to something like Jacobi's reading of Kant.

12 See Fichte, *Science of Knowledge, with First and Second Introductions*, translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 45.

In following Kant, Fichte suggests that interpretations that base the critical philosophy on the thing in itself erroneously take passages out of context because of a failure to master the wider position. A direct consequence of this interpretation is to commit Kant simultaneously to dogmatism and to idealism. Dogmatism is the view that thing in itself—of things in themselves if this term takes a plural—affect(s) us, and idealism is the contrary view that »all existence« is explained solely through »the thinking of the intellect.«¹³ For an idealist, we do not need to invoke an unknown world as the source of phenomena, which, since they do not refer beyond themselves, are not appearances.

Fichte argues for his reading of Kant's position as follows. Kant cannot himself base the critical philosophy on a thing in itself standing outside experience unless he expressly claims to do so.¹⁴ For Kant, as Fichte interprets him, our »knowledge all proceeds from *an affection*, but not affection *by an object*.«¹⁵ In conceding there is an input in knowledge but denying any effort to accord it an ontological status, Fichte reads Kant as not invoking an unknown and unknowable world, hence as avoiding Platonism. Kant, as Fichte interprets him, is already a post-Kantian, the author of the theory that explains the general possibility of knowledge without any appeal to the thing in itself.

Since Kant must »reject the assumption of *thing existing in themselves outside us*,«¹⁶ a thing in itself is licit as a pure thought, but illicit as more than that, say, when causality is crudely attributed to it. Reinhold's view that philosophy requires something different from the self as its basis—a view allegedly shared by Eberhard and Schulze – should be given up in favor of Jacobi's conviction that Kant does not rely on anything distinct from the self.

4. Fichte's exoteric view of the thing in itself

The discussion of the thing in itself in the two *Introductions* suggests Fichte simply rejects this concept as a perversion of the intellect. If he did

13 Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 56.

14 See Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 58.

15 Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 60.

16 Fichte: *Science of Knowledge*, p. 54.

so, and if the thing in itself referred to the idea of the mind-independent world, then Fichte would simply be giving up any reference to the way the world is as part of his rejection of the thing in itself. In fact, his view is more complex. as a glance at the first version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* shows. In the third part, Fichte works out the meaning of the claim that the subject, or self, determines a not-self, or object, postulated as real for the subject. He calls attention to a basic distinction concerning the subject understood as rational, hence limited, and as »an absolutely posited and thus unrestricted entity.«¹⁷ This distinction is Fichte's way of referring to someone who is limited by the surrounding context, but, to the extent one is self-aware, also unlimited. Fichte goes on to argue that the unity of the subject arises through the ideal dimension with respect to what ought to be. Now, as Fichte immediately points out, the ideal presupposes the real. In unpacking this claim, Fichte makes the familiar point that the subject requires an object against which it strives in the process of self-realization. The result, Fichte claims, is an inescapable circle in which the subject depends on an external thing in itself, or noumenon, which exists only for it.¹⁸

Like Kant, Fichte is a realist. At a minimum, »realism« means for Fichte that consciousness depends on something else. His version of realism is transcendental in that anything other than the subject is explicable as its own product, hence as not independent of, but rather dependent, on the subject. The resultant theory is circular, since from the real perspective the subject depends on an independent object that, from an ideal perspective, is merely dependent.

Turning now to the thing in itself, Fichte identifies it with the independent real, in a word with the way the world is as it is, in short with what is usually called metaphysical realism in writing: »This fact, that the finite spirit must necessarily posit something outside itself (a thing in itself), and yet must recognize, from the other side, that the latter exists only *for it* (as a necessary noumenon), is that circle which it is able to extend into infinity, but can never escape.«¹⁹

I take Fichte to be claiming that awareness of anything presupposes an independent world, which is then explained from the vantagepoint of the

17 Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 219.

18 See Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 247.

19 Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 247.

subject. Philosophical problems, which emerge in the world in which we live, hence in practice, are explained through theory, hence ultimately through self-consciousness as the basis of consciousness. Since there is no escape for the circular relation in which the subject is determined by and determines the object, whatever we think or do comes up against the mind-independent world that is knowable by us not in itself but only insofar as it becomes an object for individuals. It follows that the cognitive object, or mind-independent reality, is both in itself and also in the subject.

In difficult language, Fichte now makes a version of the basic idealist claim for the identity of subject and object, knower and known. Knowledge concerns an interaction between subject and object, in which the latter is both independent and dependent. It is ontologically independent as the source of consciousness; and it is epistemologically dependent as the mere construction of the knowing subject. »This relation of the thing in itself to the self forms the basis for the entire mechanism of the human and all other finite minds. Any attempt to change this would entail the elimination of all consciousness, and with it of all existence.«²⁰

5. Fichte's two views of the thing in itself and knowledge

In his less rigorous writings, Fichte's exoteric view of the thing in itself can be summed up as the idea that it is no more than a basic mistake. In the more rigorous texts, Fichte's esoteric view of the thing in itself amounts to the claim that it is a literally indispensable concept. The two views can be reconciled by saying that in his less rigorous writings Fichte rejects the view as it is ordinarily understood in what he calls vulgar Kantianism, but in his more rigorous writings he offers a different reading he accepts as philosophically fruitful.

The view he rejects, and which he associates with dogmatism of any kind, consists in explaining knowledge on the basis of the world, roughly any form of the familiar causal view of perception, which is currently perhaps best known under the heading of naturalizing epistemology.²¹ Fichte

²⁰ Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 249.

²¹ For a classic statement of this view, see »Epistemology Naturalized,« in W. V. O. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York: Columbia University

refuses as dogmatic any view that attributes ontological status to a thing as the cause of sensation, since we need only concede that, as Fichte following Kant claims, we are affected. In its place, Fichte recommends a theory of knowledge based on the assumption there is an external world that cannot be known, but through interaction with which we gain knowledge of a different world we experience and know. »According to the Science of Knowledge,« Fichte writes, »then, the ultimate ground of all reality is an original interaction between the self and some other thing outside it, of which nothing more can be said, save that it must be utterly opposed to the self.«²²

There is no way to know if Fichte has correctly captured Kant's concept of the thing in itself. Yet suffice it to say that Fichte's view is generally Kantian in at least three ways: it bases the analysis of knowledge on the subject; it invokes the representation of an object; and it features both transcendental idealism and empirical realism. Yet if the statement of the problem in the Herz letter is the standard, Fichte departs from Kant in rejecting any effort to understand the relation of the representation to the cognitive object standing outside experience about which, as he correctly point out, nothing can be said. Unlike Kant, for Fichte knowledge presupposes an object about which nothing can be known in limiting cognition to what is given in and known through experience. In this way, Fichte saves the possibility of knowledge at the evident price of denying causality to the world in itself.

This result is important for any theory of knowledge. In reformulating the concept of the thing in itself, Fichte suggests that the cognitive object is located partly outside of and partly within experience, and knowable solely but wholly in the latter respect. In this way he moves the discussion of knowledge away from what is as it is, or what is in itself, toward what is for us. Since Fichte eschews metaphysical realism for empirical realism, the problem he bequeaths to his successors is how to know no more than the world as given in experience. Henceforth, the problem of knowledge no longer lies in inferring from experience to what lies beyond it; it rather lies in uncovering successive dimensions of the objects of experience and knowledge.

Press, 1969, pp. 69–90.

22 Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 246.

Fichte and the Problem of Logic: Positioning the *Wissenschaftslehre* in the Development of German Idealism

Nectarios Limnatis

1. *Introduction or How to Read Fichte's Novelty*

Although Kant had emphasized the twofoldness of human agency, its natural and intelligible nature, he provided no convincing way of uniting the spheres of theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as natural-scientific and moral action. Without such unity the reality of practical reason is questionable, especially in the light of the progress of naturalism. Kant's treatment of the problem of freedom in the third antinomy left his followers dissatisfied with the outcome. Humans do not abide only in the intelligible world of freedom, but also (and primarily!) in the natural world, in which Kant concedes absolute necessity. Eventually, in the immediate post-Kantian discussion the notion of freedom became the axis of philosophical inquiry.¹

Fichte set off from the ambiguities that Kantian dualism had let loose. Borrowed from Kant, the original duplicity of human agency is Fichte's »basic anthropological presupposition«² and, simultaneously, it is the point

1 For a detailed discussion of this shift see Nuzzo A. »Transformations of Freedom in the Jena Kant Reception (1785–1794),« *The Owl of Minerva*, 32:2 (Spring 2001), pp. 135–167.

2 On the »dividedness of the human condition« which unites the often overlooked »existential and scientific tasks of philosophy« see Breazeale D. »Philosophy and

of departure from which he sought to derive a unified theory of subjectivity. His attempt was undertaken on the basis of the Kantian primacy of the practical over the theoretical reason. Fichte transcended the limits between the two via the expansion of the nomothetic rights of the former in the realm of the latter. Once, in a letter to Reinhold, he even conceded that his entire system was from the beginning to the end a mere analysis of freedom. Radicalizing the autonomy of practical reason, and insisting on that being equals to being »through freedom,«³ Fichte established himself as a leading philosopher of freedom.⁴

The above-outlined approach constitutes the typical reading of Fichte's involvement in the development of German Idealism. Its justification notwithstanding, such interpretation is far from exhausting the philosopher's originality. For the emphasis on moral action and free will should not overshadow the logical and epistemological innovation which constitutes, in my opinion, Fichte's most substantial philosophical contribution and the most radical departure from Kant. For the purpose of the current article, I shall emphasize that Fichtean theoretical I is not only procedural (mediating the transition to practical philosophy),⁵ but has its own essential epistemological weight.

the Divided Self. On the »existential« and »scientific« tasks of the Jena Wissenschaftslehre,« *Fichte Studien* 6, 1994, pp. 117–147.

- 3 *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, ed. I.H. Fichte, eight vols. (Berlin: Viet and Co., 1845–46); rpt. along with the three vols. of *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes nachgelassene Werke* (Bonn: Alolphus-Markus 1834–35) as *Fichtes Werke* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), hereafter abbreviated as *SW*, *SW IX*, p. 14. Citations of Fichte's writings refer first to the volume and page number in *SW*, then to the English translation quoted, if available. I have modified English translations wherever I found it necessary.
- 4 Characteristic is the influential approach of Alexis Philonenko. See Philonenko A. *La liberté humaine dans la philosophie de Fichte*. Paris: Vrin, 1966. On Fichte's concept of freedom see also Gaidenko P.P. *Paradoxy Svobody v Uchenii Fichte* (Paradoxes of Freedom in Fichte's Doctrine). Moskva: Nauka, 1990.
- 5 According to the standard interpretation, what Fichte attempted to show is that self-positing is necessary for practical subjectivity and his theoretical inquiry was meant to ground his *Sittenlehre*. See for example, Baumanns P. *Fichtes ursprüngliches System. Sein Standort zwischen Kant und Hegel* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1972); Neuhouser F. *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Wood A. W., »The «I» as Practical Philosophy«, in

The logical and methodological aspects of development of the debate in German Idealism are clearly underrepresented in the existing scholarship, despite the fact that several authors have long ago argued that the main say of German Idealism in the history of ideas has to do with elevating the »rationality standard,«⁶ with employing dialectic as cognitive logic,⁷ with epistemological circularity,⁸ etc. In the present paper it will be argued that Fichte's works are, above all, *methodologically* innovative and, in this respect, his contribution to the evolution of German Idealism both path-breaking and notably underestimated. He introduces original and radically new insights into the post-Kantian discourse, and a whole series of ideas that are typically attributed to Schelling and, more often, to Hegel, like those of contradiction, circularity, totality, historicity of cognition, activity and practical nature of consciousness, were profoundly discussed by Fichte. As the widely spread attitude has it, one reads Fichte »in order to make sense of Hegel«. In fact, one must read Fichte in order to understand how much Hegel owes to Fichte.⁹

Sedgwick S. *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy. Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 93–108. For specific treatment of the meaning of the term »system« in respect to the unity of theoretical and practical reason, see Nuzzo A. »The Unity of Philosophy in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*, 1798–1799,« in Breazeale D., Rockmore T., eds., *New Essays on Fichte's later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), pp. 157–174.

- 6 Hortsman R.P. *Die Grenzen der Vernunft. Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Alton Hein, 1991).
- 7 Ilyenkov E.V. *Dialectical Logic: Essays on its History and Theory*, trans. H. Campbell (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979).
- 8 Rockmore T., *Hegel's Circular Epistemology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
- 9 Hegel's appropriation of Kant was »everywhere influenced by Fichte's reading of central issues and unresolved problems in Kant.« Pippin R. *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 42; Hartmann N. *Die Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1960), p. 278. The question is brought up from time to time in Fichte research, especially in the works of W. Hartkopf, R. Lauth and, more recently, W. Martin, R. Pippin, T.M. Seebohm, and others.

2. *The Notion of a Philosophical Science and its Relation to Logic*

Fichte interprets Kant's system as a philosophical propaedeutic to science, rather than scientific cognition *per se*. Yet he is convinced that absolute certainty is possible, and that »philosophy is a science«¹⁰ which must be characterized by systemicity, all-inclusiveness, clarity, and precision. That Fichte reproduces the scientific ambitions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, can be demonstrated by the fact that he characteristically calls his system *Wissenschaftslehre* (Doctrine of Science). The philosopher is confident that he has found the way to elevate philosophy to the rank of complete science which must be systematic and axiomatic. As he puts it, »A science possesses systematic form. All the propositions of a science are joined together in a single first principle, in which they unite to form a whole.«¹¹ Adopting Reinhold's idea, Fichte perceives the exposition of the scientific system in the form of propositions. The unity of the system must be based on a presupposed first principle or fundamental proposition, the so-called *Grundsatz*, the truthfulness of which must be beyond question. From that initial proposition, one may proceed to the next one, and so on, and thus build a system. Provided formally correct inference, the unconditioned validity of the first principle, *ipso facto* corroborates the unity between that principle and the system grounded thereupon.

Although the above-outlined procedure is common to both philosophy as well as any other science, Fichte posits philosophy proper at a privileged level. Where »ordinary« sciences simply »abstract« from their object by using principles, philosophy reflects upon the nature of those principles themselves. In his grasp, philosophy, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, is a meta-science, a discipline universal in nature and able to provide the fundamental and unequivocally applicable principles for all domains of rigorous knowledge. Therefore, philosophy as science requires a principle that is supposed to ground the possibility of cognition *per se*. It is supposed to substantiate »the absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge.«¹² The first principle of philosophy, then, must be one that is

10 SW I, p. 38; *Fichte. Early Philosophical Writings*, translated and edited by D. Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), hereafter abbreviated as EPW, p. 101.

11 SW I, p.38; see also 40, 41, 47,48,59,etc.

»absolutely certain; that is, it is certain, *because* it is certain; it provides the foundation of all certainty.«¹³

Fichte's approach demands the phenomenological ›bracketing‹, the *αποχή* from any particular content or application, and the examination of what it is to have a principle, to have knowledge, to have a system. As the inquiry able to answer the meta-questions about the principles of science, philosophy is then »*the science of science as such*.«¹⁴ Philosophy as scientific system must be self-sufficient and grounded on its own, it must have »an absolute and unchanged evidence in its own self, which absolutely nullifies the possibility of its opposite as well as all doubts.«¹⁵

Thus, philosophy is posited at the level of an examination of the general presuppositions of knowledge, as offering the frame to which all other inquiries must conform. However, if philosophy is a general logic of cognition, as Fichte seems to suggest, then a question arises about the relationship between philosophy and traditional logic. Addressing this issue, Fichte arrives at a position which is momentous for the later development of German Idealism. According to the »ordinary opinion«, he notes, it is the task of traditional logic to offer the form to particular sciences.¹⁶ In this respect, philosophy is also an examination of the logical principles of knowledge: logic and philosophy »both have one object, they are knowledge about knowledge, but still, they have different views of that same object.«¹⁷ Philosophy *is* logic, albeit not general (formal) logic. Not being confined to a formal set of research rules, philosophy is rather the examination of the possibility of those rules themselves. Whereas formal logic operates as an abstraction from any given content, philosophy is reflection¹⁸ upon that abstraction, and the form that logic extracts becomes the content of philosophical reflection. Thus, in philosophy form and content, as well as abstraction and reflection, »are both one and the same activity.«¹⁹

12 SW I, p. 91; J.G. Fichte. *Science of Knowledge with the First and Second Introductions*. Edited and translated by P. Heath and J. Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), hereafter abbreviated as HL, p. 93.

13 SW I, p. 48; EPW, p. 108.

14 SW I, pp. 43,45,46,55; EPW, pp. 105, 106,107, 114.

15 SW VIII, p. 376ff.

16 SW I, pp. 56, 66; EPW, pp. 115, 122.

17 SW IX, p. 105; SW I, p. 67.

18 Ibid.

19 SW I, p. 68.

The one is not possible without the other²⁰ and philosophy is broader and more fundamental than logic. Fichte strikingly calls this latter »not a philosophical science at all.«²¹

The former does not *provide the foundation* for the latter; it is, instead, the latter which provides the foundation for the former. The *Wissenschaftslehre* simply cannot be deduced from logic. Prior to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, one may not presuppose the validity of a single proposition of logic – including the law of contradiction. On the contrary, every logical proposition and logic in its entirety must be deduced from the *Wissenschaftslehre*. We have to show that the forms which are established within logic really are the forms of a particular content within the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Logic, therefore, derives its validity from the *Wissenschaftslehre*, but the validity of the latter is not derived from the former.²²

Philosophy's supremacy and command over formal logic is clear and impressive. The former reflects upon and defines the latter. Even with respect to what seems to be the nucleus of proper thinking, the law of non-contradiction, this law is given to logic by the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Logic itself neither arrives nor reflects upon such rule. According to Fichte, it just »freely applies« the rule. One may detect here the replica of the Kantian principle of freedom as the primary attribute of reason. However, it is necessary that the *Wissenschaftslehre* must demonstrate. »All that distinguishes the *Wissenschaftslehre* from other sciences is this: the object of these other sciences is itself a free act, whereas the object of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is a set of necessary acts.«²³ Whereas the *Wissenschaftslehre* is meant to express some »necessary« intersubjective laws of rationality, »logic is an artificial product of the freedom of the human mind.« Whereas the *Wissenschaftslehre* is the »exclusive condition« of knowledge and all sciences, logic is a means of their improvement, »a highly beneficial device for securing and facilitating scientific progress.«²⁴

20 Hartkopf, W. S. »Die Dialektik Fichtes als Vorstufe zu Hegels Dialektik,« *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 21, (1967), Heft 2, S. 173–207, p. 183ff

21 SW I, p. 67; EPW, p. 123.

22 SW I, p. 68; EPW, pp. 124–125.

23 SW I, p. 72; EPW, p. 127.

24 SW I, p. 69; EPW, p. 124.

By positioning *Wissenschaftslehre* at the metalevel of discourse (metal-ogic, metascience, metaknowledge), Fichte aims at attaining a vantage point that would justify unqualified cognitive objectivity. The philosopher searches into the mere possibility of the logical from a meta-logical level, into knowledge as knowledge of knowledge and logic as logic of logic. Philosophy proper is supposed to examine the objectivity of the subjective, no matter how correct the subjective seems. Any improved *version* of knowledge does not harm the *objectivity* of knowledge, but only overcomes a previous, less adequate version of it. Emphasizing the subjective limitations of any possible cognition, Fichte admits that »one may never claim infallibility.«²⁵ Mistakes, errors and imperfections are due to the human factor, not to the system, not to the way knowledge *per se* should be. Ideally, the system of *Wissenschaftslehre* as meta-science *must* be all-inclusive, infallible, and perfect. The philosopher asks: how can we learn that $5 \times 9 = 45$ and not 36? The question itself already implies the existence of a given rule of inference, but it is the rule that is the object of the meta-analysis of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. For the latter is by definition positioned beyond the subjective, as a verification of the subjective.

Easy to see, at this point Fichte falls into a circle, one of the many that he concedes in his texts. For it turns out that the mere examination of the subjective requires the subjective; the search cannot be carried out otherwise, as the *Wissenschaftslehre* »is not merely a rule, but it is at the same time the calculation.«²⁶ It seems then that the meta-rules of cognitive judgment must be borrowed from what is being judged and, in such case, objectivity is unattainable. The *Wissenschaftslehre* is meant to provide an exposition of human mind in systematic manner, and portray the necessary laws of thinking that pertain to all finite reason. Fichte's intend is to expose the objective validity of rationality, which should not depend on human factor and its imperfection. For men are »not the legislators of the human mind, but rather its historiographers.«²⁷ However, the historiography of spirit is not the same as spirit itself, even less it is the same as objectivity *per se*. Therefore, the question about the possibility of attaining unqualified objectivity remains open and, thus, Fichte's doctrine seems to represent just another attempt at reaching what is probably unreachable:

25 SW I, p. 76; EPW, p. 130.

26 SW I, p. 75; EPW, p. 129.

27 SW I, p. 77; EPW, p. 131.

unqualified (absolute) knowledge. It is not by accident that the thinker himself continued to reformulate his *Wissenschaftslehre* throughout his life, leaving behind around 15 versions. Beginning with the urge for unconditional objectivity, Fichte arrives at the opposite, at a conclusion that objectivity always denotes the phenomenological horizon of rationality. This is why, on the one hand, he maintains the strive for unconditional certainty, and, on the other hand, in a striking anticipation of Hegel's *Phenomenology*,²⁸ he writes that »the Science of Knowledge is to be a pragmatic history of the human mind.«²⁹

At the same time, the issue about the logic of spirit is sharply put by Fichte. For he clearly infers that the rules of formal logic, including the law of non-contradiction, do not represent the eternal satellite of rationality, but only its device, and that rationality is not the same as formal logic at all. Behind Fichte's contention, as one can discern, there lays the Kantian distinction between general and transcendental logic, and the limitations of general logic that Kant had pointed at. But Kant's distinction collapses when in the *Critique of Pure Reason* he allows himself to transport the principles of general logic into the analysis of the transcendental logic. For Kant's own metalogic (the transcendental logic as the logic of truth), although distinct, still succumbs to the same principles to which general (formal) logic does. This issue is especially lucid Kant's analysis in the Transcendental Analytic. In the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant confronted the problem of contradiction, but maintained a twofold position, viewing dialectic as inevitable, on the one hand, and as the logic of *illusion*, on the other hand. He conceded that contradiction is *not a mere subjective mistake* that can be avoided, but is the logic of the appearing object (the phenomenon) and occurs as soon as reason overcomes its transcendental restrictions. The paramount importance of the thing-in-itself prevented Kant from moving further in the elaboration of the logical question. However, when the distinction between phenomena and the thing-in-itself weakens, (in Fichte's deliberate attempts to deduce *all* knowledge from

28 Hartkopf, W. S. *Die Dialektik Fichtes als Vorstufe zu Hegels Dialektik*, p. 202; Rademacher H. *Fichtes Begriff des Absoluten* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1970), p. 41. To be accurate, the same exact target had Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800, that is, eight years before the publication of Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

29 SW I, p. 222; HL, p. 198–199.

within the subject), the road to the development of dialectical logic lays open.

In his later works, comparing »ordinary« (formal) and »transcendental« (philosophical) logic, Fichte assigns *rest* to ordinary logic, and *becoming* to transcendental logic; *empirical nature* to the one, and *scientific nature* to the other. »This [ordinary logic -N.L.] speaks about being, that [transcendental logic -N.L.] speaks about becoming.«³⁰ Formal logic »mistakes the form for the essence«, and thus is able to produce only static concepts. Transcendental logic, offers a *genetic* image: »ours is genetic, seeing thought in its becoming.«³¹ Not only does Fichte emphasize all these distinctions, but he also charges Kant with ambiguity »that he wanted to leave the general logic standing and being valid next to the transcendental.«³²

However, if logic as a science is *a historical product of human spirit*, then can the freedom of spirit produce a different logic? If *Wissenschaftslehre* is to be accepted as a meta-logic of scientific discourse, it itself has to obey to some rules. The most important question, then, is about the principles that rule the *Wissenschaftslehre* as rigorously articulated and systematically exposed science, its relation to the logic of contradiction. At this point Fichte stops and does not directly address the logical question *qua logical*, in the way in which Hegel will soon do in his *Science of Logic*.

Still, for Fichte, the law of identity »can be demonstrated and determined only through the Science of Knowledge,«³³ and the philosopher is consecutive in his premise. His metalogic, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, is not articulated in terms of what it is supposed to be articulating and his deduction of categories already posits a different emphasis on their interrelation as compared to Kant's plain *Nebeneinandersetzung*.³⁴ Fichte's contribution to the development of dialectical discourse is crucial; the advancement his

30 SW IX, p. 127–128.

31 SW IX, p. 321.

32 »daß er neben seiner transzendentalen Logik doch die gemeine wollte stehen und gelten lassen« – SW IX, p. 329.

33 SW I, p. 99; HL, p. 99.

34 As Hegel puts it, Kant »made the categories into static, dead pigeonholes (Fächern) of the intellect.« See Hegel G.W.F. *Werke in 20 Bänden*, Redaktion Eva Moldenhauer und Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970) vol. 2, p. 10; Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*. Trans. H.S. Harris and W. Cerf (New York: SUNY Press, 1977), p. 80. They simply are, like innate structures of mind.

philosophy brings in relation to Kant is radical and, I repeat, often underestimated. Before elaborating more on this question, I will examine the *Grundsatz* and its historiographical nature.

3. *The Transcendental Self as (F)act*

Here is how Fichte illustrates his claim about the relation between logic and philosophy. Suppose that we take the proposition $A=A$, which is «undoubtedly logically correct proposition.» This proposition, it must be emphasized, suggests no actual knowledge. It simply states that if something is, then it is, without answering the question *whether* it is or not, *why* it is, *what* it is, etc. For logic, the proposition $A=A$ means »if A is, then A is,« representing just a rule of inference, not of truth. However, for philosophy, Fichte argues, this proposition means »because A is [...] then A is.« Suppose, then, that the letter A stands for the I, the self. Whereas logic would say »if I am then I am«, philosophy will say »I am posited because I am posited, because I have posited myself. I am *because* I am.«³⁵

Fichte's example is carefully chosen, for it permits him to make a momentous reversal. What in the above proposition was the particular illustration ($I=I$) of a general rule ($A=A$), turns out to be the *condition* of the validity of the rule. The reason is as follows: the proposition » $A=A$ « is originally valid *only for the I*. It is a proposition derived from the »I am I«, which is a proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Thus all of the content to which the proposition » $A=A$ « is supposed to be applicable to must be contained within the I. Therefore, A can be nothing but something *posited within the I*, and the proposition in question now reads: »That which is posited within the I is posited«. If A is posited within the I, then A is posited.³⁶ Fichte's shift will constitute the basis of his system: the logical relationship gains proof through the human subject. Yet the subject seems here to come from the outside, becoming the condition of the whole argument, instead of being its outcome. The whole enterprise initially aimed at *deducing* the I as the starting point of the analysis. Instead, the I becomes the exemplifying case.

35 SW I, p. 69; EPW, p. 124–125.

36 SW I, p. 69–70; EPW, p. 125.

As it is obvious, Fichte's position reproduces the circularity of phenomenological consciousness that was discussed above, and makes the search for absolute objectivity collapse. The philosopher's view is that the identity proposition »is posited at least *in the I*, and posited by the I which judges in the above proposition,«³⁷ it is a »fact of empirical consciousness.«³⁸ The identity proposition is the I's, the self's own positing of itself. »*I am absolutely because I am.*«³⁹ »The I posits itself and by mere self-assertion it *exists*; and conversely, the I *exists* and *posits* its own existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once agent and the product of action; the active and what the activity brings about.«⁴⁰ Such is the paradox of human existence. I must be in order to be, and, moreover, in order to inquire about my existence. The I can grasp itself only in retrospect, circularly. Whatever I think of is what *I* think of, and this implies my self-identity, I=I.

Thus, the positing of the self receives no analytic explanation, but description. The principal attribute of the I is the *de facto* existing and *de facto* realized ability to posit itself. The I posits itself, and posits itself because it is. Self-positing and being are one and the same. The positing is just, as M. Vetö expresses it, an »auto-positing.«⁴¹ Thus, the first principle, instead of being proven, is taken for granted. The self then has to be first grasped in an act of intellectual intuition.⁴²

This intuiting of himself that is required of the philosopher, in performing the act whereby the I arises for him, I refer to as *intellectual intuition*. It is the immediate consciousness that I act, and what I enact: it is that whereby I now something because I do it. We cannot prove from con-

37 SW I, p. 94; HL, p. 95. Heath and Lachs render the I as »self'. For the sake of the continuity of my argument, I have modified the translation.

38 SW I, pp. 94, 95, 98.; HL, p. 95,99; etc. Cf. Heidegger M. *Der Deutsche Idealismus (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart*. In *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 29, Hrsg. v. C. Strube (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997), p.57. Heidegger calls it »the highest fact of empirical consciousness'.

39 SW I, p. 98; HL, p. 99.

40 SW I, p. 96; HL, p. 97.

41 Vetö M. *De Kant à Schelling*, p. 342–45. Vetö's denotation also matches with the etymology of the word in Greek: »θέτω εαυτόν« or to posit myself.

42 Fichte introduces the notion of intellectual intuition only in the 1797 edition of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, perhaps under the influence of Schelling.

cepts that this power of intellectual intuition exists, nor evolve from them what it may be like we cannot explain to a blind person what colors are.⁴³ The I is the positing, it is the act through which the I becomes aware of itself. It is impossible to reflect upon oneself without already being oneself. Fichte's argument cannot be demonstrated via immediate reflective rationalization for reflection is possible only by presupposing oneself as existing. An in such case, the question of objectivity of reflection occurs anew. So one has to move from the one level of consideration to the next, and so on to infinity. The inquiry about the self already presupposes the self. This paradoxical circle of the reflection upon a 'ready made' consciousness forces Fichte to admit that the I must initially posit itself *intuitively*. As he acknowledges, »that such a positing occurs, can be demonstrated by nothing else than a fact of consciousness, and everyone must demonstrate it for himself by this fact; nobody can prove it to another on rational grounds.«⁴⁴

However, the intuition is only the first step. The next one is the revelation of the self as active entity. Fichte's intellectual intuition is by definition an activity. Separating oneself from oneself, making the self an object for the self, means positing oneself. By the same token, in that very first step of positing, the self reveals itself as active (»striving«, in Fichte's terminology): to posit means to act, and to posit oneself means to actively understand oneself. The object (that is, the self which becomes the object of the self) *cannot be grasped in contemplation*. Fichte arrives at a standpoint of tremendous importance for the entire subsequent discourse from Schelling to Marx: to be means to be active, »reason cannot even be theoretical if it is not practical; no intelligence is possible in man if he does not possess a practical capacity«⁴⁵ Consciousness is coming to be in its activity. Activity is the way in which the I realizes itself.

Fichte's has a multi-step strategy. The self posits itself initially as intuition. By positing itself, the self reveals itself as active. At the same time, intuition is an intellectual act. Therefore, the self realizes that it is also reflecting on itself. By the same token, the self has to intuitively separate itself in order to realize that it intellectually gazes its own self. The intuition is meant to demonstrate the facticity of the self, and the reflection is meant to demonstrate the intellectual nature of the self. These two facets of the

43 SW I, p. 463; HL, p. 38.

44 SW I, p. 252; HL, p. 223.

45 SW I, p. 264; HL, p. 235.

self are conceived as logically sequential, not timely sequential. However, the logical movement of the self from intuition to reflection has its historical mirroring. Time is the realm where the ego realizes itself. Consequently, history is going to be the guess of the coming to be of the self in Fichte's practical philosophy. This idea about history will be more emphatically put in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, in which the natural and historical (in this sense, practical) self is restored as the otherness of the intellectual (theoretical) self. Similar will be the advance in Hegel's system.

Once the self realizes itself as such, the formal laws of inference are employed to deduce further knowledge. From the first principle, the I, Fichte proceeds to deduce the second principle, the not-I. By accepting that the I equals to the I, it can be derived that the not-I is equal to not-I, and then that the I is not equal to the not-I ($I=I$; $-I=-I$; $I \text{ not} = -I$). Thus, the self is opposed to the external manifold.

In deducing the first principle, the reflection is inward. The I makes itself an object. In deducing the second principle, the reflection is outward, it concerns something else that the self, the object qua object. Thus, the I posits the not-I and the subject is discerned from the real object. Nevertheless, the discernment occurs *within* consciousness, within the self (this issue shall constitute a fundamental point of criticism against Fichte on behalf of Schelling and Hegel). It is the self that posits the not-self, the subject that posits the object. Such is the direction in which Fichte propels Kantian dualism. Therefore, Fichte finds it possible to demonstrate the unity of both self and object, in a dramatic methodological advancement which is full of dialectical explorations and anticipations. I will now specifically address this issue.

4. Fichte's New Dialectic and the Grasp of the Problem of Contradiction

We have seen that the Fichtean I is analogous to the Kantian subject's transcendental unity of apperception. Fichte's subject, however, consists of more than the Kantian ›unity‹. The Kantian opposition between subject and object is in Fichte's doctrine *transferred within the subject itself*, and the consequences of such shift are path-breaking. The fundamental characteristic of Fichte's subject is the antithetical nature that floods its entire activity, and the *Wissenschaftslehre* is respectively pervaded by such dia-

lectic. Fichte's formal acceptance of the law of identity is supplemented by the proof of the identity's limitations throughout the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Not identity but difference and contradiction prove to be the »logical structure that lays on the ground of the *Grundlage*, in the general light of which one can understand the meaning of Fichte's critical idealism or his »transcendental« thinking.«⁴⁶

Fichte portrays these oppositions in the very first acts of the I. The structure of the activity of the I is triple and unified. The I posits itself, posits the opposite of itself, and posits itself as united with what is opposed to itself. Thus, not only does the I produce the not-I, but it is at the same time identical to it, for both itself and its otherness are posited by the I. »Both I and not-I are alike products of original acts of the I, and consciousness itself is similarly a product of the I's first original act, its own positing of itself.«⁴⁷ The initial juxtaposition creates a salient result: Thus I is not= I, but rather I= to not-I, and not-I = I.«⁴⁸

Fichte carefully avoids the danger that »the identity of consciousness, the sole absolute foundation of our knowledge is itself eliminated«⁴⁹ in the universality of contradiction, by invoking the concepts of limitation and divisibility: the I and not I are posited in consciousness as limited and divisible, that is, the one is posited as reality to the extent that the other is negated. The identity of consciousness is maintained as the one that unites the opposites. Thus, »the I is to be equated with, and yet opposed to itself,« and in tandem the opposition is »united, without detriment to the unity of consciousness.«⁵⁰

Consciousness contains both opposites within itself. This is what Fichte understands as *Machtspruch der Vernunft*.⁵¹ The limitation of one act by

46 Duso G. »Absolutheit und Widerspruch in der Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre,« in Fuchs E., Radrizzani I., Hrsg., *Der Grundansatz der ersten Wissenschaftslehre Johan Gottlieb Fichtes* (Neuried: Ars Una Verlag, 1996, pp. 145 –158), p. 145.

47 SW I, p. 107; HL, p. 107.

48 »Mithin ist Ich nicht= Ich, sondern Ich = Nicht-Ich, und Nicht-Ich =Ich,« in SW I, p.107; HL, p.107.

49 SW I, p. 107; HL, p. 107.

50 SW I, p. 110; HL, p. 109.

51 See also Heidegger's discussion in Heidegger M. *Die Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus*, pp. 80–92, esp. p.89; Comparing Fichte to Hegel, R. Kroner discerns their similarity, but also a deficiency of Fichte in that the *Grundsätze* are not sup-

the other is not a formal negation, but a dialectical inclusion. Moreover, the most striking aspect of Fichte's argument is the following: limitation and divisibility do not take place as consecutive acts: *they are simultaneous*. Thus, I and not-I are posited as divisible, yet »immediately within and alongside the act of opposition; both are one and the same, and are distinguished only in reflection.«⁵² Not only must the I posit »a conflict of opposing directions,« but it must also not posit either one of them alone, »it must posit them both and must posit them *in conflict*.«⁵³ Fichte's approach differs from the Kantian indeed in a radical way, and demonstrates a striking similarity with Hegelian arguments. The famous Hegelian identity of identity and non-identity is already introduced in Fichte's line of reasoning.

Having explained the antithetic of the self, Fichte then proceeds to a second round of reasoning on the same issue, in order to arrive at a more principal rule. Asking that one abstracts from the content of what has been said, the philosopher puts forth a formal proposition: »A in part = -A, and *vice versa*«⁵⁴ which is supposed to substitute the I and not-I that were opposed when posited as divisible. These two are mediated by an X (which stands for the I). Suppose, then, that all things that are posited are equal to themselves (according to the formal law of identity: A=A, B=B, etc). In such case B should count as -A because it is not posited through the A, but through the X. Therefore, »From this it is evident that the proposition A=B can be valid, though as such contradicts the proposition A=A. A=A, X=X, B=X. Hence A = B to the extent that each =X«⁵⁵

Eventually, Fichte offers a striking response to Kant's famous question how *a priori* synthetic judgments, that is, judgments that produce new knowledge, are possible: »all synthetic concepts arise through unification

posed to be separated from each other, but be only one. See Kroner R. *Von Kant bis Hegel*, 2. Bd. (Tübingen: Mohr 1924) pp. 436–8. As a matter of fact, it is one and the same subject that contains the unity of propositions, and this is clear already in Fichte.

52 SW I, pp. 109, 113; HL, p. 108, 112.

53 SW I, p. 336; EPW, p. 248.

54 SW I, p. 111; HL, p. 110.

55 SW I, p. 111; HL, p. 111.

of opposites [...] In every proposition, therefore, we must begin by pointing out opposites which are to be reconciled.»⁵⁶

From there, the philosopher goes on to elaborate the Kantian idea of synthetic thinking. In Fichte's grasp, synthetic thinking constitutes in »discovering in opposites the respect in which they are *alike*.«⁵⁷ At the same time, it should be clear that »here can be no antithesis without synthesis; for antithesis consists merely in seeking out the point of opposition between things that are alike; but these like things would not be alike if they had not first been equated in an act of synthesis,«⁵⁸ that is, in an act of consciousness. Consciousness, by being able to articulate its own self-only by including its otherness in its own self, is, thus, able to combine oppositions together, »both must be thought as *one and the same*.«⁵⁹ And elsewhere: » it is the office of the synthesizing faculty to unite opposites, to *think* them as one.«⁶⁰ Thus, the I divulges itself in a restlessness opposition: »the action of the I [...] is purely antithetical.«⁶¹ Yet, this twirl is not only antithetical, but also integrative, for »the activity, as synthetic unity, is most briefly described as *an absolute conjoining and holding fast of opposites*.«⁶² Fichte writes straightforwardly: »from the very fact of absolute opposition there follows the entire mechanism of the human mind; and this entire mechanism can be explained no otherwise than by the fact of absolute opposition.«⁶³

A detailed examination of Fichte's deduction is beyond the scope of the current paper. However, it must be emphasized that Fichte's derivations follow the same fundamentally dialectical structure that is permeated by constant contradictions. Thus, the Fichtean I unfolds as being determining, in one respect, and determined, in another; as being limiting in one respect and limited in another; as being passive in one respect and active in another. Fichte puts on display an interchange of activity, limitation, exchange, transition (*Thätigkeit, Beschränkung, Wechselln, Übergehen*), and

56 SW I, pp. 114, 123; HL, p. 112, 120.

57 SW I, p. 113; HL, p. 111.

58 SW I, p. 113; HL, p. 112

59 SW I, p. 129; HL, p. 125

60 SW I, p. 225; HL, p. 201.

61 SW I, p. 335; EPW, p. 248.

62 SW I, p. 205; HL, p. 185.

63 SW I, p. 226; HL, p. 202.

universal fluidity, a dialectic in which »the matter determines its form« and »form determines its matter«, »infinity and bounding are united in one and the same synthetic component.«⁶⁴ The philosopher portrays a reciprocal movement of »coming-to-be through and passing away, a becoming though a disappearance« (*ein Entstehen und Vergehen, ein Werden durch ein Verschwinden*).⁶⁵ in which »light and darkness are not opposed in principle, but differ only in degree. Darkness is simply a very minute amount of light.«⁶⁶

The path-braking nature of Fichte's attempt is demonstrated in Hegel's praise: »These particular thought-determinations he calls categories, and he seeks to demonstrate them in their inner necessity; from the time of Aristotle onwards no one had thought of so doing.«⁶⁷

The theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* ends with the deduction of representation, in which the philosopher argues for the crucial role of the power of imagination (*freie Einbildungskraft*).⁶⁸ The »interplay of the self, in and with itself, whereby it posits itself at once as finite and infinite – an interplay that consists, as it were, in self-conflict, and is self reproducing, in that the self endeavors to unite the irreconcilable, now attempting to receive the infinite in the form of the finite, now, baffled, positing it again outside the latter, and in that very moment seeking once more to entertain it under the form of finitude – this is the power of *imagination*.«⁶⁹ Granted the intellectual intuition as the means, mind develops a specific ability, »the power of imagination, which reconciles the contradictions,«⁷⁰ in order to bring together the opposing directions and manifestations of its activity.⁷¹ Obviously, Fichte's dialectic has a substantial restraint compared to the thoroughly transparent exposition that Hegel will later

64 SW I, p. 214; HL, p. 192.

65 SW I, p. 179; HL, p. 165.

66 SW I, p. 145; HL, p. 138.

67 Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 20, p. 400; .Hegel G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. III. Trans. E.S. Haldane, and F.H. Simson (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 491.

68 On the notion of imagination see the informative essay by A. Philonenko »Über die schöpferische Einbildungskraft bei Fichte,« in Fuchs E., Radrizzani I., eds., *Der Grundansatz der ersten Wissenschaftslehre Johann Gottlieb Fichtes*, Neuried: ars una Verlag, 1996, pp. 165–77.

69 SW I, p. 215; HL, p. 193.

70 SW I, p. 218; HL, p. 195.

present: there is no place for imagination in the *Science of Logic*. In Fichte, imagination assists the mind in forming an ideal image that helps to correlate the real with the ideal, infinity and finitude, unity and diversity and abridges the gap between the object and its image representation. Imagination »by its own nature, wavers in general between object and non-object,«⁷² playing the role of the mediator between the I and the image of reality. The results of imagination are put together by the understanding. For to under-stand means to stabilize (the English word successfully transfers the etymological structure of the German *Verstehen/Verstand*). Thus, as Fichte writes, »it is the power whereby a transiency is *arrested, settled*, as it were, or brought to a stand, and is thus rightly termed *understanding*. – Understanding is such simply insofar as something is stabilized therein; and everything stable is stabilized in the understanding. It might be described either as the imagination stabilized by reason, or as reason furnished by the imagination. – Understanding is a dormant, inactive power of the mind, the mere receptacle of what imagination brings forth, and what reason determines or has yet to determine; whatever may have been told of its doings at one time or another.«⁷³

The attempt to systematically deduce knowledge by demonstrating its interrelations forced Hegel to admit that in Fichte one finds the first »rational« attempt to deduce the categories.⁷⁴ Hegel's use of the word reason is not inadvertent. It amounts to the acknowledgement that the *de facto* elimination of the distinction between the thing-in-itself and the phenomena is accompanied by the obliteration of the Kantian sharp separation between reason and understanding. Hegel interprets Fichte's shift as having a surprisingly positive outcome, namely, the portrayal of both faculties as acting within one and the same dimension. Such implicit unity is substantial for Hegel's own grasp. *The unification of reason and understanding*

71 For a recent discussion of the entire process of philosophical abstraction in Fichte, see Breazeale D. »Inference, Intuition and Imagination. On the Methodology and Method of the First Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*,« in Breazeale D. Rockmore T., eds., *New Essays in Fichte's Foundation of the Entire Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2001), pp. 19–36; Hoeltzel S. »Fichte's Deduction of Representation in the 1794–5 *Grundlage*,« in *ibid.*, pp. 39–59.

72 SW I, p. 243; HL, p. 215.

73 SW I, p. 233; HL, p. 207.

74 Hegel, *Werke*, 20 Bd., S. 401; Hegel, *Lectures*, vol. III. p. 493.

has unique epistemological importance for it permits to see theoretical knowledge as thoroughly dialectical. At the same time, Hegel renounces Fichte's separation of epistemology from ontology, and charges him with recognizing »the finite spirit alone, and not the infinite« and failing to »attain the idea of reason as the perfected, real unity of subject and object.«⁷⁵

Fichte's dialectic may be seen as the »limitative« dialectic⁷⁶ of the human subject (opposed to the »speculative« Hegelian dialectic which is based on a circularly achieved infinity). By putting a specific weight on the finitude and limitedness of self-consciousness, Fichte's dialectic is non-metaphysical⁷⁷ and may thus offer identifiable advantages from a contemporary angle. It is not by accident that Hegel saw Fichtean philosophy as containing »nothing speculative.«⁷⁸

Undoubtedly, both Schelling and Hegel are indebted to Fichte to a much greater degree than it is usually believed or they themselves admit. Advancing the Kantian dialectic in a decisively new way, Fichte did so in a manner that stimulated⁷⁹ and profoundly anticipated the development of German Idealism toward Hegel, and later toward Marx. Regrettably, this issue is rarely addressed with regard to Fichte as its initiator.

Finally, I must mention that the shortcomings of Fichte's shift, especially his treatment of nature and of the thing-in-itself,⁸⁰ become evident to his contemporaries, and also play crucial role in the development to-

75 Hegel, *Werke*, 20 Bd., S. 408, 409; Hegel, *Lectures*, vol. III, p. 499.

76 Janke W. *Vom Bilde des Absoluten. Grundzüge der Phänomenologie Fichtes* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 187–212.

77 See also Hartkopf, W. S. *Die Dialektik Fichtes als Vorstufe zu Hegels Dialektik*, p. 205.

78 Hegel G.W.F. *Lectures*, vol. III, p. 504. (This passage is missing from the Suhrkamp edition of Hegel's works)

79 Zhixue L. »Methodologische Probleme der ersten Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes«, in Fuchs E., Radrizzani I., Hrsg., *Der Grundansatz der ersten Wissenschaftslehre Johann Gottlieb Fichtes*, [pp. 111–120], p. 115.

80 Here is how Fichte argues in the notorious review of Aenesidemus »The critical system [...] shows that the thought of a thing, which supposedly has existence [Existenz] and certain constitutional characteristics *in itself* and independently of any faculty of representation is a whim, a dream, a non-thought.« See Giovanni, G. di, Harris H.S., eds., *Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism* (New York: SUNY, 1985), p. 147. Fichte's approach caused furious criticism by his contemporaries.

ward Schelling and Hegel. These issues, however, are beyond the scope of the current paper.⁸¹

⁸¹ I systematically treat these questions my *German Idealism and the Problem of Knowledge: Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel* (forthcoming)

Doing Philosophy: Fichte vs. Kant on Transcendental Method

Daniel Breazeale

In the *Prolegomena*, Kant contrasts the »analytic« method of the latter with the very different method of philosophizing employed in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, which as he puts it »durchaus nach synthetischer Lehrart abgefaßt sein mußte.«¹ He further explains that in the first *Kritik* »bin ich in Absicht auf diese Frage [nach die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik] synthetisch zu Werke gegangen, nämlich so, daß ich in der reinen Vernunft selbst forschte und in dieser Quelle selbst die Elemente sowohl, als auch die Gesetze ihres reinen Gebrauchs nach Principien zu bestimmen suchte. Diese Arbeit ist schwer und erfordert einen entschlossenen Leser, sich nach und nach in ein System hinein zu denken, was noch nichts als gegeben zum Grunde legt außer die Vernunft selbst und also, ohne sich auf irgend ein Factum zu stützen, die Erkenntniß aus ihren ursprüng-

¹ P, AA, IV: 263.

Abbreviations:

AA = Kants Werke. Akademie-Textausgabe (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968).

P = Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*.

KrV = Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*

GA = J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed. Reinhard Lauth, Hans Gliwitzky†, and Erich Fuchs (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964ff.)

BWL = Fichte, *Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* (1794)

GWL = Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95)

GNR = Fichte, *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796/97)

WLnm[H] = Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (»Halle Nachschrift,« 1796/97)

WLnm[K] = Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (»Krause Nachschrift,« 1798/99)

SS = Fichte, *System der Sittenlehre* (1798)

lichen Keimen zu entwickeln sucht.«² In contrast, the »analytic« method of the *Prolegomena* simply assumes »daß gewisse reine synthetische Erkenntniß *a priori* wirklich und gegeben sein nämlich reine Mathematik und reine Naturwissenschaft,« in which case »dürfen [wir] nicht fragen, ob sie möglich sei (denn sie ist wirklich), sondern nur wie sie möglich sei, um aus dem Princip der Möglichkeit der gegebenen auch die Möglichkeit aller übrigen ableiten zu können.«³

The *Prolegomena* tells us what the proper method of transcendental philosophy *is not*. As for what it *is*, we are provided only with a bare *name* (the true method of transcendental philosophy is »synthetic«), a specific *locus of inquiry* (transcendental philosophy investigates pure reason itself), and an admonitory warning that not everyone may be capable of philosophizing in accordance with the synthetic method. Anyone who wishes to learn *how* to philosophize in this manner must turn elsewhere for assistance.

If one then turns to the *Methodenlehre* of the first *Kritik*, one again finds that Kant is primarily concerned to explain what the synthetic method of transcendental philosophy *is not*, and far less forthcoming in providing a positive characterization of the same. In the section titled »Die Disziplin der reinen Vernunft im dogmatischen Gebrauch,« one is informed that philosophy, like mathematics, is a form of *a priori* rational cognition. But whereas mathematical cognition is grounded upon »der Construction der Begriffe,« which can be presented in pure intuition *a priori*, philosophy is quite unable to construct its concepts in a similar way, for it has no corresponding access to universally valid non-empirical intuitions. Instead of being able to consider [betrachten] »das Allgemeine im Besonderen,« philosophical cognition must therefore »das Besondere nur im Allgemeinen« betrachten.⁴ Nevertheless, both philosophers and mathematicians deserve to be called »Vernunftkünstler,« inasmuch as both are concerned to provide us with synthetic cognition *a priori*. Hence, though conceptual analysis may be a valuable philosophical tool, it cannot be the primary method of philosophizing, for, as Kant writes, »Es kommt hier nicht auf analytische Sätze an, die durch bloße Zergliederung der Begriffe

2 P, AA, IV, 274.

3 P, AA, IV, 275.

4 KrV, A 713–14/B 741–2.

erzeugt werden können [...], sondern auf synthetische und zwar solche, die *a priori* sollen erkannt werden.«⁵

But if philosophy is indeed unable to appeal to *a priori* construction in intuition, then how is it supposed to obtain its synthetic *a priori* cognitions? On this crucial point, the first Abschnitt is not particularly helpful. »Philosophieren,« Kant tells us, means »discursiv nachdenken,« and »es giebt zwar eine transscendentale Synthesis aus lauter Begriffen, die wiederum allein dem Philosophen gelingt, die aber niemals mehr als ein Ding überhaupt betrifft, unter welchen Bedingungen dessen Wahrnehmung zur möglichen Erfahrung gehören könne.«⁶ Philosophy thereby provides us with the »synthetic cognition« of the rules for synthesizing what is given through empirical intuition, but not with any *a priori* intuition of a »real object.«⁷ This description of the task of transcendental philosophy does nothing, however, to address the underlying questions concerning Kant's own philosophical method, namely: *How* does the philosopher arrive at his »synthetic cognition« – not of experience itself – but of the conditions necessary for the possibility of experience? What *warrants* the specific claims put forward by the transcendental investigator of these necessary conditions? What is the *evidence* for such claims? How can they be *proven*?

Once the »transscendentale Begriff einer Realität, Substanz, Kraft etc. gegeben ist,« writes Kant, »so bezeichnet er weder eine empirische, noch reine Anschauung, sondern lediglich die Synthesis der empirischen Anschauungen (die also *a priori* nicht gegeben werden können); und es kann also aus ihm, weil die Synthesis nicht *a priori* zu der Anschauung, die ihm correspondirt, hinausgehen kann, auch kein bestimmender synthetischer Satz, sondern nur ein Grundsatz der Synthesis möglicher empirischer Anschauungen entspringen.« From this Kant concludes, »Also ist ein transscendentaler Satz ein synthetisches Vernunfterkentniß nach bloßen Begriffen und mithin discursiv, indem dadurch alle synthetische Einheit der empirischen Erkenntniß allererst möglich, keine Anschauung aber dadurch *a priori* gegeben wird.«⁸ But here again, Kant's point is primarily a *negative* one: namely, that philosophy cannot begin with definitions, since

5 KrV, A 719/B 747

6 KrV, A 718–19/B 746–47.

7 KrV, A 720/B 748).

8 KrV, A 722/B 750.

its fundamental concepts must simply be »given« to it.⁹ What he does not explain is precisely how the »transcendental concepts« in question are supposed to be »originally given to« or discovered by the philosopher.

Nor is an answer to this question to be found in the section of the *Methodenlehre* devoted to »Die Disziplin der reinen Vernunft in Ansehung ihrer Beweise.« Here again, Kant is more concerned to tell us what philosophical proofs *are not* rather than what they *are*. The transcendental propositions of philosophy are neither »*Mathemata*« nor »*Dogma*,« inasmuch as they are demonstrable neither by construction of concepts nor by direct inference from concepts.¹⁰ The synthetic method of philosophical proof is *indirect*, in the sense that philosophy must »deduce« its synthetic propositions by referring its previously given transcendental concepts to some »third thing«: namely, the concept of »possible experience.«¹¹

This may be a useful description of the distinctive character of transcendental propositions and first principles, but it does not explain *how* the philosopher is actually supposed to »prove« or to »deduce« the alleged synthetic connection between pure concepts that is expressed in his transcendental first principles. Nor does Kant offer his readers any insight into the precise manner in which mere »reference« to the concept of possible experience is supposed to function as the »Leitfaden« or »Richtshnurr«¹² for a transcendental deduction of the Grundsätze in question. Instead, he rebuffs such questions with the blunt declaration that, »Von der eigenthümlichen Methode einer Transscendentalphilosophie läßt sich aber hier nichts sagen, da wir es nur mit einer Kritik unserer Vermögensumstände zu thun haben, ob wir überall bauen, und wie hoch wir wohl unser Gebäude aus dem Stoffe, den wir haben (den reinen Begriffen *a priori*),

9 See *KrV*, A 729–30/B 757–58.

10 *KrV*, A 736/B 764.

11 This claim does not actually conflict with Kant's claim, later in the *Methodenlehre*, that philosophical proofs must be »direct« rather than »indirect.« What is rejected in this section is not the legitimacy of referring to some »third thing« (namely, possible experience) as a »Leitfaden« for proving a synthetic philosophical principle, but rather, the appropriateness within philosophy of »apogogic« proofs, which purport to prove a proposition by establishing the falsehood of its opposite. A philosophical Beweis, in contrast, must always be »directe oder ostensive,« »derjenige, welcher mit der Überzeugung von der Wahrheit zugleich Einsicht in die Quellen derselben verbindet.« (*KrV*, A 789/B 817).

12 *KrV*, A 782–83/B 810–11.

aufführen können.«¹³ This, however, is profoundly unsatisfactory, at least for anyone with questions concerning the »eigenthümlichen« synthetic method of Kritik.

Instead of directly addressing such questions, Kant is content to repeat his earlier account of the differences between mathematical and philosophical proofs and of the importance of »possible experience« for the possibility of synthetic, »transcendental cognition.« The only positive characterization he provides of his synthetic method in this section is that »Ein jeder muß seine Sache vermitteltst eines durch transscendentale Deduction der Beweisgründe geführten rechtlichen Beweises, d.i. direct, führen, damit man sehe, was seine Vernunftansprüche für sich selbst anzuführen haben.«¹⁴ But as for the kind of evidence appropriate to a direct or »ostensive« philosophical proof, Kant remains silent. He maintains a similar silence in the Jäsche *Logik*, where he characterizes the »synthetic method« as a »progressive« method, which »geht von den Principien zu den Folgen oder vom Einfachen zum Zusammengesetzten,«¹⁵ but offers no hint concerning how the transcendental philosopher is supposed to make such »progress.«

To summarize Kant's claims: Transcendental philosophy requires a distinctive method of inquiry and proof. Like the method of mathematics, the method of philosophy is *synthetic* and *a priori* and must therefore be carefully distinguished from the synthetic *a posteriori* method of the empirical sciences and from the analytic *a priori* methods of the purely formal sciences. Neither psychology nor logic can serve as methodological models for the philosopher. Nor can mathematics provide such a model, inasmuch as philosophy is unable to construct its concepts in intuition. The philosopher must *begin* with concepts acquired from elsewhere and, by relating these to the concept of possible experience, *progress* by means of »ostensive« proofs to the point where he has established the synthetic *a priori* first principles of experience überhaupt. At this point, however, the puzzled reader may well wonder *what is left for the philosopher to do* once he has dispensed with the ordinary tools of direct and indirect logical inference, conceptual analysis, and construction in pure intuition.

13 KrV, A738/B766.

14 KrV, A 794/B 822.

15 AA, IX, p. 149.

Some hint of an answer to this last question may perhaps be contained in Kant's passing use of »diskursive nachdenken« as a synonym for »philosophieren,«¹⁶ which suggests that the proper organ of philosophy is neither pure intuition nor scientific understanding, but reason itself. This might further suggest that the synthetic method of philosophizing is a matter for »reflektierende Urteilskraft« and that the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is best understood, in the words of Claude Piché, »comme auto-critique de la faculté de juger.«¹⁷ However, Kant himself does not explicitly endorse such an interpretation.

At this point, one might simply quote Fichte's comment that Kant »überhaupt zu wenig über sein Philosophiren selbst philosophirt zu haben scheint«¹⁸ and conclude that the only way to understand Kant's own philosophical method is to ignore his rather unhelpful methodological pronouncements, which, as we have seen, contain more questions than answers, and concentrate instead upon a detailed analysis of Kant's actual *practice* as a transcendental philosopher in his three *Critiques*.

Such a difficult and ambitious enterprise will not be pursued here. Instead, I will now turn to a consideration of how Kant's problematic notion of »synthetic method« was received and reinterpreted by one of his most talented and original followers, J. G. Fichte, and I will focus my attention upon the early or Jena version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. As we shall see, Fichte's appropriation of the synthetic method of philosophizing eventually led him to articulate a philosophical methodology that appears to conflict directly with some of the chief features of Kant's and that profoundly influenced the future course of classical German philosophy.

Though Fichte's relationship to Kant has been frequently studied,¹⁹ little attention has been paid to the question of philosophical method, and yet this is one of the more illuminating points of comparison between the *Wissenschaftslehre* and the Critical philosophy, inasmuch as Fichte clearly

16 See KrV, A 719/B 747.

17 Claude Piché, *Kant et ses épigones. Le jugement critique en appel*. (Paris: Vrin, 1995), p. 11.

18 Fichte zu Reinhold, 4 Juli 1797, GA, III/3: 69.

19 For a recent and particularly thorough example of such a study see Armin G. Wildfeuer, *Praktische Vernunft und System. Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur ursprünglichen Kant-Rezeption Johann Gottliebe Fichtes* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzbock, 1999).

believed that one of his most important *advances* upon Kant was his far more scrupulous and explicit attention to methodological issues. As he wrote in 1793, »Kant hat überhaupt die richtige Philosophie; aber nur in ihren Resultaten, nicht nach ihren Gründen. Dieser einzige Denker wird mir immer wunderbarer; ich glaube, er hat einem Genius, der ihm die Wahrheit offenbart, ohne ihm die Gründe derselben zu zeigen!«²⁰ Fichte was determined that a similar objection could never be raised against his *Wissenschaftslehre*. He therefore made every effort to follow a rigorous and perspicuous method in the deduction of his own philosophical conclusions. He wanted it to be plainly evident to his readers that every single claim advanced by the *Wissenschaftslehre* is completely determined by those that precede it, for, as he explained to Schiller, this alone makes possible »meine[s] synthetischen Aufsteigen.«²¹ Even before arriving in Jena, as he was preparing for his first public presentation of his new system before an informal audience in Zurich, Fichte declared that, »Mein Vortrag ist immer synthetisch; ich werfe meine Gedanken nie hin, wieweil ich sie unsichtbar in meiner Studierstube gedacht habe, sondern ich denke sie, finde sie, entwickle sie vor den Augen der Hörer, und mit Ihnen; ich bemühe mich dabei den strengsten logischen Gang auch in den kleinsten Theilen des Vortrags zu gehen.«²²

Like Kant, Fichte sought to distinguish the properly »synthetic« method of transcendental philosophy from the methods of logical inference, conceptual analysis, and empirical proof. But unlike Kant, he also provided his readers with several, elaborately detailed accounts of what he meant by the synthetic method of philosophizing and made a point of explicitly fol-

20 Fichte an Heinrich Stephani, Mitte Dezember 1793, *GA*, III/2: 28. This same point is further elaborated in Fichte's December 6, 1793 letter to F. I. Niethammer: »Meiner innigen Ueberzeugung nach hat Kant die Wahrheit bloß angedeutet, aber weder dargestellt noch bewiesen. Dieser wunderbare, einzige Mann hat entweder ein Divinations-Vermögen der Wahrheit, ohne sich ihrer Gründe selbst bewußt zu seyn; oder er hat sein Zeitaltern nicht hoch genug geschätzt, um sie ihm mitzutheilen; oder er hat sich gescheut, bei seinem Leben die übermenschliche Verehrung an sich zu reißen, die ihm über kurz oder lang doch zu Theil werden mußte. Noch keiner hat ihn verstanden; die es am meisten glauben, am wenigsten; keiner wird ihn verstehen, der nicht auf seinem eignen Wege zu Kants Resultaten kommen wird« (*GA* III/2: 20–21).

21 Fichte an Schiller, 27 Juni, 1795, *GA*, III/2: 358.

22 Fichte an J. K. Lavater, Anfang Februar, 1794, *GA*, III/2: 60.

lowing this method – or, as we shall soon see, these *methods* – of demonstration in all of his systematic treatises. Though I shall make reference in what follows to a number of different texts from the Jena period, I will concentrate my analysis upon a single text, the *Grundlage des Naturrechts* of 1796/97, a work that Fichte himself explicitly recommended for the particularly rigorous [*streng*] manner in which it observes and illustrates the »synthetic method« of philosophizing.²³

The *Grundlage des Naturrechts* opens with a provocative series of claims: The *Wissenschaftslehre* is to be sharply distinguished from virtually all preceding philosophies, inasmuch as it is grounded in a clear insight into the reflexive structure of *Ichheit* itself, in which subject and object, ideality and reality, are originally and synthetically united in the sheer and spontaneous self-assertion of the I. The task of transcendental philosophy is to provide a complete description of all of the acts of the I that are necessary for the possibility of and thus implicit in the originally posited self-positing of reason, and the method appropriate for such a *descriptive* task is that of *inner observation*. Fichte characterizes the resulting description as »genetic,« inasmuch as each of the described acts of the I is explicitly recognized by the philosophical observer to be the condition for the possibility of the previously described acts, and hence for the possibility of the absolutely and originally posited unity of self-consciousness itself. Since such a genetic description of the necessary acts of the I demonstrates that consciousness, in order to posit itself, must also posit a »world« with a certain necessary structure, it may also be described as an *a priori*, genetic description of experience itself.

The »strict method« of proof to which Fichte pledges to adhere in the *Grundlage des Naturrechts* is a method of radically purified and rigorously disciplined »inner observation.« This is what distinguishes the *Wissenschaftslehre* from mere introspection or from armchair psychology.²⁴

23 See SS, GA, I/5: 104–5.

24 Fichte's rejection of what would today be called »psychologism« begins with his criticism of Platner and continues in his famous criticism of the effort of Schmid and others to base philosophy upon an appeal to the »facts of consciousness.« It becomes even more explicit and pointed in his writings of 1799–1801. See, e.g., »Antwortschreiben an Herrn Professor Reinhold« (1801) and »Aus einem Privatschreiben« (1800), where Fichte notes that unlike psychology, which deals with »facts of consciousness,« which one simply discovers to be the case, the *Wis-*

The transcendental philosopher is not concerned to record the contingent »Tatsachen des Bewußtseins.« He is in search of the *necessary* and *universal*, that is a *a priori*, conditions of the same, which he identifies with the *necessary* and *pure* acts of the self-positing I. In order to place himself in a position to observe such acts, the philosopher must elevate himself, by means of a freely undertaken act of global »abstraction,« from the standpoint and concerns of ordinary life and then carefully »attend« [*aufmerken*] to what remains after he has abstracted from everything from which he is able to abstract – that is, from everything except pure self-consciousness. If he does this, Fichte assures us, he will be able to detach the necessary acts of the I from the »product« of the same (the world of ordinary experience) and will thereby come into possession of an entirely new realm of pure inner experience and will be able to observe the acts in question and to describe them in their relation to one another (that is, »genetically«). For the philosophical observer, these are always *acts of thinking*, inasmuch as they represent *what else one has to think* in order to »think the I.« Transcendental philosophy requires not only that the philosopher make the effort required to think these necessary thoughts, but, at the same time, that he actively observe his own activity in doing so.

Since the universal criterion of »reality« is the feeling of being compelled to present [*darstellen*] something in a specific way, and since the philosophical observer is similarly »compelled« to present the self-constitutive acts of the pure I in the manner in which he observes them, it follows that one must also attribute a certain »reality« to such acts, as well as to his description of the same. Fichte's point here is that the *Wissenschaftslehre* does not fabricate its objects (the necessary acts of the); it discovers and observes them. This is why it deserves the name »Reellephilosophie.«²⁵

What makes such a descriptive Reellephilosophie *synthetic* is the *amplicative* character of philosophical cognition obtained in this way. The results established by the *Wissenschaftslehre* are not derivable by mere analysis of the concept of the I nor by logical inference from any set of concepts and principles. Instead, such transcendental cognitions are grounded upon actual (inner) intuitions of a series of pure and necessary acts of the I. The

senschaftslehre deals with »was man nur so vorfindet, wenn man sich findet « (GA I/6: 387n.).

25 See sections I and II of the Introduction to *GNR*, as well as § 7 of *BWL*.

obvious parallels between this method of philosophical observation and description and Husserl's method of phenomenological reduction and eidetic intuition suggest that one might describe Fichte's method of philosophizing, at least as characterized so far, as the »phenomenological-synthetic method.«²⁶

It is precisely because it employs such a phenomenological-synthetic method that Fichte sometimes describes the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a »history« – or »pragmatic history« – »of the human mind.«²⁷ Such a history can claim to be accurate only insofar as the philosopher finds himself *compelled* to describe the acts of the mind in precisely the manner and in precisely the order in which he actually observes them. Moreover, conclusions derived from such descriptions can be described as necessary, *a priori* truths only insofar as the philosopher also observes not merely *that* the I *does* act in a certain way, but also that it *must* act in this determinate way. He thereby becomes, in Fichte's words, the »Zuschauer eines reellen Denken seines Geistes,« der »Vernunft überhaupt in ihrem nothwendigen Handeln.«²⁸ The philosopher »hat sie [dieser bestimmten Handlung] selbst

26 See Breazeale, »Fichte's *nova methodo phenomenologica*: On the Methodological Role of ›Intellectual Intuition‹ in the later Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*,« *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* [Brussels] no. 206 (1998): 587–616.

27 Fichte famously describes the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a »pragmatische Geschichte des menschlichen Geistes« (GWL, GA, I/2: 364–65 and BWL, GA, I/2: 147) or simply as »die Geschichte des menschlichen Geistes« (GA, II/3: 107) or »die Geschichte des entstehenden Bewußtseins« (WLn[K], GA, IV/3: 464). As I have shown elsewhere, this phrase is to be understood in a manner consistent with the above description of the method of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. A »history of the human mind« is a *genetic* account of the self-constitution of the I in the form of an ordered *description* of the various acts of thinking that are presupposed by the act of thinking the I. Though the phrase »history of the human mind« does not occur in *GNR*, it does occur in the preface to a student transcript of Fichte's lectures on the »Philosophische Wissenschaft des Rechts« from the Winter Semester of 1795/96 (his first lectures on the subject). See GA, IV/3: 60.

For a detailed examination of this topic, see Breazeale, »What is a ›Pragmatic History of the Human Mind‹? Some Methodological Remarks on Fichte's Jena Project,« in *Fichte: Crença, imaginação e temporalidade*, ed. Fernando Gil, Virginia López Dominguez, and Luisa Couto Soares, pp. 89–108. Porto: Campos das Letras 2002) and »Fichte's Conception of Philosophy as a ›Pragmatic History of the Human Mind‹ and the Contributions of Kant, Platner, and Maimon,« *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2001).

28 *GNR*, GA, I/3: 316 and 316n.

nach ihrer Form,²⁹ der Handlungsweise in ihr sowohl, als dasjenige, was in diesem Handeln für das Reflexion enstetht, zu beschreiben. Er liefert dadurch zugleich den Erweis der nothwendigkeit des Begriffs, bestimt ihn selbst und zeigt seine Anwendung.«³⁰ Since Fichte understood this phenomenological-synthetic or »genetic« method to be the true method of transcendental philosophy *überhaupt*, he concluded that this must have been Kant's actual method as well, despite Kant's failure to make this clear.³¹

There are, of course, numerous difficulties and problems implicit in such a conception of the method of transcendental philosophy, and chief among these is issue of the alleged »purity« – hence the »universality« and »necessity« – of the descriptions in question. Fichte was certainly not insensitive to this problem, even if his solution is not without problems of its own. As we have already noted, he apparently believed that the purity of the philosophers inner intuitions and hence the universality of his descriptions is, so to speak, *guaranteed* by the *completeness* of the initial act of free abstraction which precedes his series of self-observations.³² But the only way he could »prove« such a tendentious claim was to challenge his readers and critics to perform the requisite acts of abstraction and inner observation postulated by the *Wissenschaftslehre*, so that they could then verify Fichte's conclusions for themselves. In keeping with the spirit of the phenomenological-synthetic method, the *Wissenschaftslehre* would have to be treated as an *experimental* enterprise which every inquirer would have to test for himself.

As appealing and as open-minded as such a proposal might seem, Fichte himself was most unwilling to countenance the possibility that his own results could ever be »falsified« by such independent »testing.« On

29 That is, transcendental philosophy describes how each new act is related to all of the preceding acts it has described. This »genetic: method of derivation is what produces the systematic »form« of such a philosophy.

30 GNR, GA, I/3: 319.

31 »Eine solche [reelle, genetische] Philosophie einzuführen, und alles bloß formelle Philosophieren abzuschaffen, war der Zweck der Kantischen Schriften« (GNR, GA, I/3: 317).

32 See Breazeale, »The ›Standpoint of Life‹ and ›The Standpoint of Philosophy‹ in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*,« in *Transcendentalphilosophie als System: Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen 1794 und 1806*, ed. Albert Mues, pp. 81–104 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1989).

the contrary, he insisted that the *Allgemeingültigkeit* of his system was simply beyond question and that however much one might vary the form in which this philosophy was presented, the underlying content was eternally true. If someone were to report that his »experiment« in »thinking the *Wissenschaftslehre* for himself« had failed to corroborate Fichte's claims, Fichte's was always ready with the same prepared, deeply *ad hominem* response. Such a failure does not indicate any error in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, but lies within the critic himself. A person who is unable to discover within himself the series of original acts of the I described by Fichte has either failed to abstract *completely* from his own personal experience and individual I or simply lacks the requisite capacity for concentrated philosophical *Aufmerksamkeit*. Fichte characterized the talent in question as »das philosophische Genie«³³ or »Geist in der besondern Bedeutung,«³⁴ and, to the consternation of friend and foe alike, he was not in the least reluctant to accuse others of lacking such philosophical talent altogether.³⁵ And if this were not enough, he was willing to go even further and to attribute the incapacity of his critics to judge his philosophy to an underlying moral failure or character flaw, which prevented them from taking the first step toward understanding a »philosophy of freedom.«³⁶

There is, however, more to Fichte's synthetic method than we have indicated so far. In order for philosophical reflection to obtain an *object*, the philosopher has to *think* – and think hard; for what he is trying to »observe« are those acts of positing that condition the originally posited act of

33 GNR, GA, I/3: 316n. See too the controversial footnote on this subject in the first ed. of *BWL*, as well as Fichte's comment thereupon in the second ed., GA, I/2: 143n.

34 On this point, see the second of Fichte's three lectures »Ueber den Unterschied des Geistes und des Buchstabens in der Philosophie,« GA, II/3: 323–33.

35 The *Naturrecht* is particularly rich in *ad hominem* attacks on critics and unsympathetic readers. Even Fichte's friends and supporters complained about the *tone* in which he criticized anyone who criticized or professed to be unable to understand the *Wissenschaftslehre*. See, for example, Reinhold's remarks on this topic in his February 14, 1797 letter to Fichte (GA, III/3: 51).

36 Here one is reminded of the famous »Stück Lava im Monde« remark from the *WGL* (GA, I/2: 326n.), as well as of the invidious characterization of philosophical »dogmatists« in the 1797 Introduction to the *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre*. For a detailed discussion of this topic see Breazeale, »How to Make an Idealist: Fichte's ›Refutation of Dogmatism‹ and the Starting Point of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,« *Philosophical Forum* 19 (1987/88): 97–123.

pure self-positing. In order to move beyond the bare concept of the I as subject-object, the philosopher must make the considerable intellectual effort required to raise this concept – along with his own act of constructing this concept – to clear consciousness, which means that he has to ask himself: what *else* must one think in order to »think the I«? It is these acts of necessary thinking that provide the objects for philosophical reflection or inner intuition.

The transcendental philosopher therefore has to play a *dual role*: On the one hand, he is the »observer« of those acts that are required for the self-constitution of subjectivity. As such, he becomes, in Fichte's words, a passive »Zuschauer auf dem Theater [seiner] Geistes«.³⁷ On the other hand, he must also take the stage and assume the role of the pure I or pure reason itself.³⁸ In this capacity he must actively »seek out« [*aufsuchen*] whatever else has to be thought in order to »think the I.« In doing this, he is of course subject to the very laws of thinking that he is also trying to discover, including the familiar principles of logical analysis and inference and the rules of syllogistic reasoning).³⁹ Hence the phenomenological-synthetic method requires more on the part of the philosopher than mere »inner intuition.« Once the necessity of a particular »synthesis« (or act of synthetic thinking) has been established, the task then becomes that of *explicating* [*erörtern*]⁴⁰ the new concept or principle grounded thereupon, in

37 *Eigne Meditationen über ElementarPhilosophie/Practische Philosophie*, GA II/3: 70. See too *WLnM[K]*: »Die WissenschaftsLehre ist nicht etwa selbst Erzeugerin einer Erkenntniß, sie ist bloß Beobachtung des menschlichen Geistes im ursprünglichen Erzeugen aller Erkenntniß« (GA, IV/3: 480).

38 Whereas the »formulaic philosopher« is conscious only of his own thinking (and hence only of the acts of his own individual I, the »real [*reelle*] philosopher,« by virtue of the act of abstraction with which he begins, is able to become the observer of the necessary operation of »Vernunft überhaupt,« according to its own inner laws (GNR, GA, I/3: 316n.).

39 This does, of course, raise a certain problem of circularity, since philosophy not only has to employ these laws and principles, but is also supposed to »deduce« or »prove« the universal validity of the same. Fichte was very clearly aware of this problem, and hence of a certain, unavoidable circularity in his own – indeed, in any – philosophical method. See Breazeale, »Circles and Grounds in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*,« in *Fichte: Historical Contexts/Contemporary Controversies*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1994), pp. 43–70.

order to determine what »gehört dazu«.⁴¹ This means that the philosopher must analyze his previously established concepts and draw inferences [*Folgerungen, Schlüsse, Corrollaria*] from his previously established propositions or theorems,⁴² and, where appropriate, incorporate the latter into formal, syllogistic arguments.⁴³

Thus, when we look more closely at the kinds of *thinking* and at the modes of *argument* actually employed in the *Naturrecht* and in Fichte's other »scientific« writings, it soon becomes obvious that his actual method – or, rather, methods – of philosophizing are quite a bit more complex

40 Thus, for example, after having established, in the second theorem of the *Naturrecht*, that a finite being cannot ascribe to itself free efficacy in the sensible world without ascribing the same to others and thus presupposing their existence, Fichte describes the next task as that of *analyzing* this proposition, in order to *explicate* [*erläutern*] and *clarify* what has already been established (GNR, GA, I/3: 344). See too § 14, where, once the synthetic principle of the law of coercion has been proposed, Fichte's next step is to »analyze it in order to clarify it« – and to continue the analysis until the concept of a law of coercion »is fully exhausted« (GNR, GA, I/3: 426, 429).

41 GNR, GA, I/3: 390. See too § 12, in which Fichte »analyzes« the claim that that the concept of the formal freedom of a being outside of me prescribes the quantity of the material self-limitation I must impose upon my own freedom and concludes that this proposition »contains« three distinct elements (GNR, GA, I/3: 412). Note also that Part Two begins with an explanation of the need to »analyze, and with greater care than has been necessary up to this point, the concept of a contract in general« (GNR, GA, I/4: 5). This analysis is intended to provide the »premises« for an examination of the concept of the *Staatsbürgervertrag*.

See too GNR, GA, I/3: 384, where Fichte announces that »our path now leads us to an explication [*Erörterung*] of the *inner* conditions of such reciprocal interaction.« See too the long section, »Von der bürgerlichen Gesetzgebung,« in Part Two, which commences with the claim that all we need in order to exhaust the topic of civic legislation is a »complete explication« [*vollständig erörtern*] of the previously described contract (GNR, GA, I/3: 20). As Fichte explains in *BWL*, to »explicate« a concept scientifically is »to assign it a place« in relation to other concepts (GA, I/2: 127).

42 GNR, GA, I/3: 344.

43 See for example, the strictly deductive »proof« (*Beweis*) in § 14 of one of the corollaries of the principle of the law of coercion: viz., that each person must exercise as much care not to violate the rights of others as he does to prevent his own rights from being violated. This proof consists in showing how the corollary in question follows logically from propositions that have been previously established (GNR, GA, I/3: 428).

than his own quasi-phenomenological account of the descriptive method of »real philosophical science« would seem to suggest. In fact, the *Wissenschaftslehre* also employs a distinctively »synthetic« kind of *thinking*, to a consideration of which we now turn.

By far the most innovative, as well as the most frequently employed mode of inference in the *Naturrecht* is what might be described as a »dialectical« method of proof. This method, which was perfected in Part Two of the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, proceeds by making explicit a contradiction (or, alternatively, a vicious circularity) implicit in a previously derived set of propositions, and then actively »seeking out« [*aufsuchen*] some new, »higher principle« that allows one to avoid the objectionable contradiction (or circularity) and is *therefore* declared to be »necessary.« Unlike conceptual analysis, logical inference, or syllogistic reasoning, this »dialectical« method of derivation is thoroughly *synthetic*, in the sense that the new principle that »hebt« oder »aufhebt« the contradiction in question is not »contained in« and thus cannot be analytically derived from the problematic set of concepts and propositions that it resolves. Furthermore, since it is not derived from experience, but is instead a product of pure thinking, this new principle is »*a priori*« and represents a synthetic *a priori* extension of our cognition. In order to distinguish this aspect of Fichte's synthetic method from the previously discussed »phenomenological-synthetic method,« I will henceforth refer to it as Fichte »dialectical-synthetic method.«

Despite the fact that Fichte frequently employs this dialectical method of derivation in his Jena-period writings, he seldom formulated it explicitly or indicated how it is to be related to his own phenomenological method or to the methods of ordinary conceptual analysis and logical inference. We must therefore resort to specific examples in order to understand the method in question. For present purposes, one such example will have to suffice. In § 8 of the *Naturrecht* Fichte remarks that one can trust another person to subject himself to the law of right only if one knows

Or see Fichte's comment, in § 7, that his deductive proof [*Erweis*] of the external conditions for the possibility of a community of free being »is based solely on the presupposition of such a community, which is itself grounded on the possibility of self-consciousness,« and that »all the conclusions up to this point have therefore been derived [*abgeleitet*], by way of mediate inference [*mittelbare Schlüsse*], from the postulate ›I am I.« (GNR, GA, I/3: 384).

that he will not violate one's rights; and one can be sure that the other person will actually respect one's rights only if one believes him to have sincerely subjected himself to the law of right. In this case, concludes Fichte, »Das gegründete ist nicht möglich, ohne den Grund; und der Grund ist nicht möglich, ohne das begründete. Wir sind daher in einem Zirkel befangen,« und »wie in einem solchen Falle nach synthetischer Methode verfahren müsse [...] werden wir sogleich sehen.«⁴⁴ Faced with such a »unauflöslliche« or »offenbare« circle or contradiction, the only way to make synthetic progress is not my means of closer inner observation by rather, by means of an act of *creative* or *imaginative* thinking. »Nach der in der Wissenschaftslehre erwiesenen Methode werden, um den Widerspruch zu heben, die beiden Glieder synthetisch vereinigt.«⁴⁵ What this means in the case at issue is that one must introduce the thought of a »third party« who will act as the future guarantor of the present agreement between the first two parties. In this manner, an apparently analytic »contradiction« provides the occasion for a new *synthetic* inference.

This pattern of argument is repeated over and over again in the *Naturrecht*. On occasion, it is even explicitly formulated in terms of a »thesis« and its »antithesis,« which produce a contradiction that is in turn »gehoben« by a new »synthetic« proposition.⁴⁶ (This new proposition should not be understood as simply »uniting« or »synthesizing« the conflicting proposition that preceded it; instead, it is »synthetic« in the sense that it cannot be analytically derived from the preceding contradiction, even as it serves to overcome the same.) Sometimes Fichte even formulates this manner of proof »nach strenger Methode« in quasi-mathematical terminology, as the »Aufgabe« of »seeking out« [*aufsuchen*] a certain concept = X that will resolve a preceding contradiction.⁴⁷

What is essential to note about this method of dialectical-synthetic thinking is that no algorithm is available for solving such problems. At each stage of such a derivation one encounters new *contradictions* that cannot be analytically resolved, fresh *problems* to be solved and novel

44 GNR, GA, I/3: 394–95.

45 GNR, GA, I/3: 395–96. For other explicit »thesis/antithesis« formulations of the synthetic method of proof, see GNR, GA, I/4: 41–42 and 59–60.

46 GNR, GA, I/3: 397.

47 GNR, GA, I/3: 433–34.

challenges to be met.⁴⁸ To say, with Fichte, that an appropriate solution to such problems is something we have to »aufsuchen«⁴⁹ is to recognize that every such problem must be dealt with in its own terms and that each requires a fresh exercise in *creative problem solving*. Neither past nor present experience can offer us any guidance in such cases, for here we remain within the realm of pure reason⁵⁰ – or, if one prefers, of pure »reasons« – and must therefore seek our solution in the pure realm of *imaginative thinking*.

Anyone who has ever tried to construct a proof in geometry, to solve a mystery, or, indeed, to demonstrate a philosophical proposition is surely acquainted with the kind of »Vermögen« presupposed by Fichte's dialectical/synthetic method. But such a person will also be acquainted with another, problematic feature of all such »solutions« or »proofs,« and one that Fichte steadfastly refused to recognize. I am referring to the problem of *necessity* and *uniqueness*. It is surely one thing to construct or to imagine a »workable« solution to a problem or an ingenious way of avoiding a theoretical contradiction by introducing a new, synthetic principle, but it something else altogether to claim that the solution in question is the *only possible one*. This, however, is precisely what Fichte does claim for his own

48 For some additional examples of Fichte's dialectical/synthetic mode of proof, see GNR, GA, I/3: 407–8, 447–48, 453, and 456–57; GA, I/4: 12, 59–60, and 159–60. The famous »deduction,« in §§ 5 and 6, of the human body and of the two organs of the same – as well as the corresponding deduction of the various external »media« through which these organs can be affected – also contains many examples of »dialectical« inference of the sort described above.

Consider too the case of *money*, the necessity (and determinate character) of which Fichte »derives« from the contradiction between (1) the civil guarantee that once a citizen has fulfilled his duties of protection and support with regard to the state he has an absolute, unrestricted right to the remainder of his possessions and (2) the state's absolute right to appropriate the products of each citizen's labor in order to make possible the exchange of goods, thereby allowing everyone to live off his own labor. The property right seems to be contradicted by one of its immediate implications. Here again we are forced to »seek out« a solution and thereby to demonstrate the *necessary* introduction by the state of legal tender, which allows the state to control the substance of its citizens' possessions, but not the form thereof (GNR, GA, I/4: 41).

49 GNR, GA, I/4: 50.

50 See, for example, Fichte's claim to have deduced the necessity of the ephorate, not from any appeal to experience, but »aus reinen Vernunft« (GNR, GA, I/3: 449)

dialectical-synthetic proofs⁵¹ – and indeed, this is what he must claim in order to warrant his conclusion that his specific proposals for resolving the various contradictions that arise when one tries to think the concept of a just relationship among human beings represent necessary, synthetic cognitions *a priori*.⁵² This is true of all of Fichte's dialectical-synthetic arguments: though one has to admire his ingenuity in coming up with creative ways to avoid apparent dead ends, one is often at a loss to explain why the specific solutions he proposes are the *only possible ones*. A similar objection can of course be made against the many later philosophers, beginning with Hegel, who appropriated Fichte's dialectical-synthetic method of philosophizing.

Let us conclude our brief analysis of Fichte's synthetic methods of philosophizing by considering his own most explicit and sustained account of the same, which occurs in the Halle *Nachschrift* of his lectures on *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*. Here, in a passage titled »Über synthetische Methode,« Fichte explicitly distinguishes three »Methoden eine Materie synthetisch abzuhandeln«⁵³:

First, there is the method that he says is employed in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, and especially in Part II of the same, as well as in the latter portions of the *Naturrecht*. In this case one begins with some contradiction, »und diesen nur dadurch zu lösen sucht, daß man das und das *p[er]ge* annimmt.« This is the method described above as »synthetic-dialectical,« and according to Fichte it is the most difficult type of synthetic method.

A second approach is to begin with a »Hauptaufgabe« or »postulate,« and then carry out the indicated task, not all at once, but by means of a long, interconnected series of »mittelbare Sätze.« (More accurately stated, these »Sätze« merely describe one's inner intuitions of the various subsidiary *acts* one had to perform in order to execute the »Hauptaufgabe.«) This, Fichte explains, is the method employed in the first half of the *Wis-*

51 See e.g., Fichte's claim that his dialectical argument demonstrates that expulsion is »die einzig mögliche Straffe« for magistrates convicted of betraying their public trust (*GNR, GA, I/3*: 453).

52 See, for example, the comment at the conclusion: »Der ganze beschriebene Mechanismus ist erforderlich, ist erforderlich, zur Realisation eines rechtsgemässen Verhältnisses unter den Menschen« (*GNR, GA, I/3*: 459).

53 *WLnm[H]*, *GA, IV/2*: 107–8.

senschaftslehre nova methodo, and though he does not mention this, it is also the method of the »pragmatic history of the human mind« in Part Three of the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* and in the first 6 §§ of the *Naturrecht*. Such a method is *genetic*, and *doubly* so, inasmuch as the philosopher's synthetic description constitutes a complete account of the »genesis« of the concept of the pure I (with which the series of observations commences) and of ordinary experience (with the concept of which the series concludes). This is the method described above as »phenomenological-synthetic.«

Third and finally, explains Fichte, one can start with a concept or principle that has already been established (presumably, by means of one or both of the previously described synthetic methods) but that remains »dunkle« and »unbestimmte« and then proceed to *clarify* [*aufklärt*] it, bit by bit. This is the type of synthetic method employed in the second half of the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*. Fichte explains that this method »ist zwischen den beyden vorigen in der Mitte,« inasmuch as what is here called »unbestimmt« corresponds to what was previously called »widersprechende« and inasmuch as the projected »clarification« is supposed to acquaint us more closely with the real object of our reflections (that is, the I) and facilitate an intuition thereof.

The difference between the second and the third type of synthetic method is that the former, but not the latter, is supposed to begin with an act of radical abstraction from everything from which abstraction is possible. The third type of synthetic method begins its descriptions »in mid-stream,« so to speak. The difference between the first and the first and the third type of synthetic method is that in the former case the contradiction or circle is already explicit, whereas in the latter it must first be made evident (presumably by an exercise in conceptual analysis and logical inference).

From all of this it follows that the second (or »phenomenological«) method, since it presupposes nothing beyond the capacity of the reader to think for – and of – himself and his ability to pay attention to how he does this, is best suited for the opening portions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, while the other two varieties of synthetic thinking only come into play as the deduction advances and as the philosopher begins to reflect upon the relationship between the propositions he has already established on the basis of inner intuition.

It is not surprising, therefore, that none of Fichte's treatises of the Jena period are pure examples of either the phenomenological or the dialectical mode of synthetic philosophizing, though one or another of these methods (or the deliberate mixture of both) predominate in particular portions of each of these works. This is precisely what one would expect, for only by combining the method of synthetic thinking with the method of synthetic observation (intuition), can transcendental philosophy achieve the goal set for it by Kant. If the critique of reason is reason's self-cognition, if all synthetic cognition requires some reference to actual or possible intuition, if philosophical reflection is to have a distinctive object of its own: if any of these things is to be possible, then even the »purest« philosophy must contain a strong phenomenological or descriptive element. But it is equally true that, if philosophy is to advance toward its goal of systematic unity, if philosophical deduction is to be capable of providing us with genuinely new cognitions and not simply with clearer insight into what we already knew, if philosophical arguments are not to founder on the shoals of circularity and contradiction, and if the power of reflective judgment is to play a role within philosophy: if any of these things is to be possible, then even the most »rigorous« and »logical« philosophical method must recognize the essential contribution of creative and synthetic (that is, dialectical) thinking and the potential positive significance of contradiction and circularity.

One implication of the preceding insight is that the differences between the methods of mathematics and philosophy are not as immense as Kant claimed. To be sure, philosophy cannot »construct« its concepts in pure space or time, but nevertheless it can and must *construct its concepts on the basis of pure (intellectual) intuition*, guided by synthetic thinking and formal logic, but always grounded upon immediate reflection. This, I take it, is one of the more important implication of Fichte's phenomenological-synthetic method, which provides nothing less than an account of *how* philosophical concepts are actually constructed and of *why* they cannot be obtained in other way. Only because it constructs its concepts in this manner can the *Wissenschaftslehre* describe itself as »eine Reellephilosophie.«

But the end of the Jena period, Fichte had arrived at a clear appreciation of the parallels between the methods of mathematics and philosophy; indeed, he made it the centerpiece of his methodological remarks and the guiding inspiration for what I consider to be the final systematic

effort of his »Jena period,« the unfinished »Versuch einer neuen Bearbeitung der W.L. 1800.«⁵⁴ Whereas, in 1794, he endorsed Kant's claim concerning the inability of philosophy to construct its concepts,⁵⁵ by 1800 he was characterizing the *Wissenschaftslehre* as »die Mathesis der Vernunft selbst«⁵⁶ and explicitly emphasizing the *constructive* character of his own phenomenological-synthetic (or »genetic«) method.

With the introduction of the concept of transcendental construction we have reached the end of our discussion of the synthetic method of philosophizing in Kant and Fichte. Much more could and needs to be said concerning the role of construction in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, a topic that has been virtually ignored by Fichte scholars – with the significant exception of Jürgen Stolzenberg, who devotes a full chapter of his book on *Fichtes Begriff der intellektuellen Anschauung* to »intellektuelle Anschauung als Beweismethode.«⁵⁷ This, however, is a subject for a future occasion.

I will conclude instead with a brief comment concerning the parallel between the method of transcendental philosophy and the original self-construction of the I: both are »synthetic« in character, a point that is alluded to by Fichte himself in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, when he remarks that, »*Synthetisch* war unser Gang bisher deswegen, weil das [I]ch aus Bedingungen seines Bewußtseyns dieses sein Bewußtseyn selbst zusammen setzt.«⁵⁸ As his use of the word »weil« in this passage suggests, Fichte apparently thought that only a synthetic or constructive method was adequate for presenting a philosophical account or explanation of consciousness, inasmuch as the latter is to be understood as a synthetic, self-constructive *process* or *activity*.

54 For an analysis of this manuscript, an analysis focused upon the concept of construction and stressing the »mathematical« structure of Fichte's method of demonstration in this fragment, see Breazeale, »Die Neue Bearbeitung der Wissenschaftslehre (1880): Letzte »frühere« oder erste »spätere« Wissenschaftslehre?« *Fichte-Studien* 17 (2000): 43–67.

55 Fichte an Reinhard, 15 January 1794, GA, III/2: 40.

56 »[Ankündigung:] Seit sechs Jahren« (dated 4 November 1800), GA, I/7: 160.

57 Jürgen Stolzenberg, *Fichtes Begriff der intellektuellen Anschauung: Die Entwicklung in den Wissenschaftslehren von 1793/94 bis 1801/01* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986), pp. 13–59.

58 *WLnm[H]*, GA, IV/2: 107.

Though there is something attractive about this proposed isomorphism, it must not be allowed to obscure a crucial *difference* between the real synthesis of the subject-object and a synthetic philosophical derivation of the same. The latter is discursive, whereas the former is not. The original self-construction of the I occurs all at once, or rather has always already happened. The moments patiently distinguished and genetically connected to one another within philosophical reflection are, as Fichte emphasized in the *Sonneklarer Bericht*, no more than an *artificial reconstruction* of the unity and original act of self-construction on the part of the I. For this reason, Fichte's insistence that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is a system of »reelle philosophische Denken« must be taken with a large grain of salt. The »pure acts« that this science describes do not really occur as such or discreetly.

What is really »real« is the finite, embodied self and its material and human world. In comparison with this, philosophical concepts and explanations are mere *fictions*, as Fichte himself conceded on at least a few occasions.⁵⁹ But they are not arbitrary ones, and it is precisely the task of the synthetic method of philosophizing to establish the necessity and universality of such concepts and principles.

Whether the synthetic methods of philosophizing discussed in this paper are adequate to such a task is an extremely difficult question and one that plagues not just the *Wissenschaftslehre* but German idealism as such. Though I cannot answer this question today, I nevertheless hope to have shown that a careful consideration of the »synthetic method of philosophizing« is an essential component of the larger enterprise of understanding and assessing the problematic claim, so central to this entire tradition, that the distinctive propositions of transcendental philosophy are »necessary« (but not analytic), »universal,« »uniquely determined,« and possess »real content« of their own.

59 See for example *GA*, II/3: 160–161), I/3; *GA*, I/3: 403–404; *GA*, IV/1: 197–8; *GA*, III/4: 360–61; and *GA*, I/7: 249–50). For detailed discussion of these passages, see Breazeale, »Fichte's Philosophical Fictions.« In *Essays on the Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre of J. G. Fichte*, ed. Breazeale and Rockmore. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002.

Form and Colour in Kant's and Fichte's Theory of Beauty*

Giorgia Cecchinato

»Who in the rainbow can draw the line where
the violet tint ends and the orange beginn?
Distinctly we see the difference of
the colours, but where exactly does the
one first belendingly enter into the other?«
H. Melville, *Billy Bud, Sailor*

In his works,^{*} Fichte does not devote much attention to the traditional themes in aesthetics.¹ One of the few places where one can find a wide

* Kant's writings are cited from *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences and its successors (Berlin, later Berlin and New York: Reimer, later de Gruyter, 1900-), abbreviated as »AA«, followed by Roman and Arabic numerals indicating volume and page of the academy edition and of the english translation respectively. I refer to the English translation by W.S. Pluhar: I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Indianapolis, 1987. Fichte's works are cited from the historical-critical edition of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, abbreviated as »GA«, followed by Roman numerals indicating the series and Arabic numerals indicating volume and page numbers respectively. The English translation is mine. I would like to thank Lara Ostarić and Isabella Ferron for their assistance.

1 A pioneer in the study of Fichte's Aesthetics was L. Pareyson, with his work *L'estetica dell'idealismo tedesco*, Torino, 1950. The part regarding Fichte is now edited by the Istituto italiano per gli studi filosofici in L. Pareyson, *L'Estetica di Fichte*, cura di C. Amadio, Milano, 1997. The interest in this question has been recently revived. See M. Ramos, F. Oncina, *Introducción a J. G. Fichte, Filosofía y estética*, Universidad de Valencia, Valencia 1998; I. Radrižani, *Von der Ästhetik der Urteilskraft zur Ästhetik der Einbildungskraft, oder von der kopernicanischen Revolution in der Ästhetik bei Fichte*, »Der transzendental-philosophische Zugang zur Wirklichkeit«, Hrsg. von E. Fuchs, M. Ivaldo, G. Moretto, 2001, pp.341–359; C. Piché, *The Place of Aesthetics in Fichte's Early System*, in D. Breazeale und T. Rockmore (Ed. by), *New Essays on Fichte*

ranging discussion of Beauty and Sublime is his *Practical Philosophy*. This manuscript, together with the *Own Meditations on Elementary Philosophy*, represents the most important writing of the period preceding Fichte's academic activities in Jena. The *Practical Philosophy* is the continuation of the *Own Meditations*. These two writings build a unitary work about the system of the transcendental philosophy, which consists on two parts, the theoretical and the practical one. These two parts represent Fichte's written meditation, in which he develops his own system in a constant confrontation with his contemporaries Kant, Reinhold and Schultze.²

With respect to the concept of Beauty, Fichte not only takes up the core problems which Kant considers in the *Critique of Judgement*, but he also follows the structure and terminology of Kant's third *Critique*. Despite this apparent accordance with Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, the systematic context of Fichte's reflections on beauty is very different from Kant's. Hence, their reflections differ in meaning and significance.

The goal of this paper is to compare Kant's concept of form and colour in the *Critique of Judgment* to the one of Fichte in his *Practical Philosophy*. The analysis of these two elements in their systematic function will show how Fichte, following in Kant's footsteps, starts on a new, original path.³

te's later Jena »Wissenschaftslehre«, Evanston, Illinois, 2002, pp.299-310. At the last International Fichtes Congress, »J.G. Fichte: Das Spätwerk (1810–1814) und das Lebenswerk«, organised by the »Internationalen Johann-Gottlieb-Fichte-Gesellschaft e.V.«, held in München in 2003, there were three contributions testifying this increasing interest: P. Lohmann, *Der Stellenwert des Kuenstlers in der Philosophie J.G. Fichtes*; P. Österreich, *Fichte und die Kunst*, and my contribution, G. Cecchinato, *Fichtes Aesthetik*, forthcoming in the proceedings of the congress. See also H. Traub, *Urphantasie, wahre Kreation und absolute Beschreibung. Transzendente Strukturelemente für die Grundlegung einer Philosophie der Kunst in zweiten Vortrag der »Wissenschaftslehre« von 1804*, forthcoming in the proceedings of the international conference »Fichte et la Doctrine de la Science 1804« held in 2004 in Poitiers.

- 2 For a detailed discussion of the chronology of the philosophical context and significance of this manuscript, see the *Vorwort* of R. Lauth in GA, II, 3, pp.3–19.
- 3 The reader should not forget that a comparison takes here place between a finished and published and a highly complex and structured work, namely the *Critique of Judgement*, the *Practical Philosophy*, which is an unpublished effort to develop a system and, hence, is a written reflection that reveals some uncertainties. A comparison between two so different kinds of writing is legitimated by the fact that Fichte explicitly relates his own work to Kant's.

1. The notion of form in the *Critique of judgment*

The first part of the *Critique of Judgment* can be considered as a meta-aesthetical reflection on the justification of the universal validity of the judgment of taste; in its independence, it belongs to Kant's wider philosophical strategy, namely Kant's target in his reflections on judgment of taste is not properly aesthetic, but more transcendental-systematic. Let us consider the following: »Since inquiry into our power of taste, which is the aesthetic power of judgment, has a transcendental aim rather than the aim to help form and cultivate taste.«⁴

The analysis of the judgment of taste discloses to a transcendental philosopher a principle in the subject that could otherwise remain hidden, and which the faculty of judgment presupposes in its reflection on nature, which further makes possible a system of experience of nature with its particular natural laws. The disclosure of this principle allows the possible realisation of the moral law in the phenomenal world, and with that the possible agreement of freedom and nature, which permits the completion of the transcendental philosophy's system.

This principle, which is the principle of purposiveness (*Zweckmässigkeit*), can only be subjectively valid in relation to the activity of the power of judgment. It does not build knowledge of objects, and cannot be known. Instead, it shows itself in the feeling of pleasure.

Even this connection with pleasure is a »strange and different«⁵ aspect of the judgment of taste that Kant tries to explain.

On one side, beauty is revealed to us in a feeling, and so it seems to have only a subjective character, like the agreeable (*das Angenehme*); on the other side, when one says »x is beautiful«, a predicate is ascribed to an object, as if the beauty were an objective quality of that object. The judgement of beauty is subjective and contingent, like a judgement which expresses only a feeling of pleasure or displeasure, but it claims to be valid for everyone »as if Beauty were a characteristic of the object.«⁶

4 AA, V 107, 7.

5 AA, V 191, 31.

6 AA, V 211, 54; on the problem of the objective reference of the aesthetic judgment see: A. Esser, *Realität und Referenz der Ästhetischen Beurteilung in Kants Theorie des Schönen*, in »Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung«, 49 (1995), pp. 430–440.

As a first step, Kant separates and distinguishes the peculiar sphere of the pleasure of beauty from the sphere of the power of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*), the sensible one and the pure one. The former one is the lowest power of desire, the latter one is the higher one. The pleasure for beauty »is also not practical in any way, neither like the arising from the pathological basis, agreeableness, nor like the one arising from the intellectual basis, the conceived good.«⁷

Among the three kinds, of Liking (*Wohlgefallen*), that Kant described, the inclination (*Neigung*) for a sensible object, the respect (*Achtung*) for what we present as good to us, the favour (*Gunst*) for beauty, the third one is the only one free. *Neigung* and *Achtung* arise necessarily. The former reveals an enslavement, a dependency on an object of sensibility. The latter one indicates a state of being bound by the moral law. The peculiarity of the pleasure of beauty consists of the fact that it relates itself only to the subject, it is free and contemplative without any interest for the existence of an object.⁸

After having distinguished Beauty from the practical realm of the power of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*), Kant distinguishes Beauty from cognition as well, namely from the understanding (*Verstand*). The judgment of beauty is not related to the concept of objects, that is, it does not ascribe objective qualities to things, but it only refers itself to a feeling while it nevertheless claims universal validity.⁹

Kant explains judgment's claim to universal validity with the doctrine of the imagination's »free play.«¹⁰ The pleasure of Beauty does not consist on a determined cognition of an object, but on the harmony of the faculties. This harmony makes possible every cognition as such. Therefore, it could be said that one speaks of *subjective* universal validity of the judgment of taste. The harmonious relation of the cognitive powers is the accord between »a given presentation« (*gegebene Vorstellung*) on one side and imagination with the understanding on the other side. This given

7 AA, V 222, 86; On the character of aesthetic pleasure see: A. Savile, *Kantian Aesthetics Pursued*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1993.

8 AA, V 209–211, 51–53.

9 On the question concerning the objective reference of the judgment of taste see: A. Esser, *Realität und Referenz der Ästhetischen Beurteilung in Kants Theorie des Schönen*, in »Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung«, 49 (1995), pp. 430–440.

10 AA, V 217, 59.

presentation is the form of the object. According to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the form is understood as the way (*modus*) in which the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) organizes and connects the elements of an object perceived by intuition in space and time. The sensation is the »matter« of the intuition, the form is the first structure which the sensations receive in space and in time. While trying to explain how the form should be understood, Kant says that »All form of objects of the senses (the outer senses or, indirectly, the inner senses as well) is either *shape* or *play*; it is either play of shapes (in space, namely mimetic art and dance), or mere play of sensation (in time).«¹¹

Both the shape and the play are a particular determination of space and time. The terms »shape« and »play« refer to a complex but unitary, organised, structure which, as the word »play« suggests, has its rules but not a determined purpose (*Zweck*). In other words, the activity of imagination in the creation of beautiful forms is a free regularity.

In the aesthetic consideration about the form, the key matter is that the form is the result of the subjective working of imagination. This activity of imagination is occasioned by a modification of the senses, that is, the action of an external object on our receptivity. The first organisation of the perceived multiplicity takes place in the passivity of sensation. Therefore the form is connected with the way in which the external object appears to the senses and becomes an object for us. However, the form is not immediately a product of a passive impression on the senses, and, as such, it cannot be perceived by the senses. It is a form of a determinate object, it is not arbitrary but it is built by the activity of imagination. In other words, imagination composes the sensible multiplicity, or provides the exhibition (*exhibitio*, *Darstellung*) of objects which correspond to a concept. In both cases imagination is guided by the understanding. Free acting means for imagination that its activity is free from the aim of the understanding. The free play of human faculties takes place when the free creation of forms corresponds in the apprehension, without the concepts of the understanding, to the general aim of the understanding spontaneously but, at the same time, is not the result of the subsuming of the apprehended manifold under the categories. The form accords to the understanding's lawfulness

11 AA, V 225, 72. For a detailed reconstruction of the notion of form in Kant, see: T.E. Uehling, Jr., *The notion of Form in Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, The Hague, 1971.

without understanding's determined rules. It is a difficult but a decisive aspect of Kant's theory of beauty, so it is important to pay attention to the fact that: on one hand »in the apprehending a given object of sense the imagination is tied to a determinate form of this object and to that extent does not have a free play«¹²; on the other hand, if one judges without referring the form to a concept, but only regarding the feeling, i.e. aesthetically, than the »object may offer it just the kind of form in the combination of its manifold as the imagination, if it were left to itself and free, would design in harmony with the *understanding's lawfulness* in general.«¹³

The importance of the form is that it allows an indirect, not material sensible, but essential reference to an object; the pleasure that goes along with the apprehension (*Auffassung*) of a form explains the spontaneous and free adequacy (*Angemessenheit*) of that object to the faculties of knowledge. This adequacy, that is the formal subjective finality of an object, is the subjective condition of the knowledge and as such, it cannot be known, but only felt. The systematic role of beauty is emphasized in this context: it reveals the contingent affinity of the world in its multiplicity with our faculty to understand it. In other words: the things which can be judged as beautiful are signs that the human being is in harmony with the world.¹⁴

Thanks to the formal conception of beauty it is not only possible to see that nature is permeable to the concepts of our understanding, but it also allows to institute an analogy between beauty and morality. In fact, in the contemplation of the form one experiences freedom which cannot be empirically presented, although its reality was already proved by the reason in the moral law.

In the judgment of taste one becomes conscious of the fact that the feeling of pleasure is not determined by a merely causal connection, that is, it is not a reaction conditioned by a sensible stimulus.¹⁵ Kant says that:

12 AA, V 240, 91.

13 Ibid.

14 For D. Henrich beauty is a way in which the understanding meets the given world. See D. Henrich, *Beauty and Freedom. Schiller's Struggle with Kant's Aesthetics*, in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetic*, ed by T. Cohen and P. Guyer, Chicago 1982, pp. 237–257.

15 On the relation between pleasure and the given representation, see: G. Zöller, *Towards the Pleasure Principle. Kant's Transcendental Psychology of the Feeling of Pleasure and Displeasure*, in: »Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongress, Kur-

»whenever we judge any beauty at all we seek the standard for it *a priori* in ourselves, and that the aesthetic power of judgment itself legislates what is concerning the judgements to whether something is beautiful or not.«¹⁶ The taste shows in its formal character an autonomy analogous to the one of the will.¹⁷

The conception of the form of beauty is the crucial point in all the essential questions of the *Critique of Judgment*: it allows the reference of Beauty to knowledge, even though beauty is not knowledge. It admits a symbolic reference to the good, even though it is independent from the power of desire.

The form is not only the essential element of the pure aesthetic contemplation, but it also plays a decisive role in the artistic production. Referring to the products of fine art, Kant must solve a problem that appears at first glance paradoxical: in front of a work of art one must be conscious that it is a product of intentional activity, namely, an activity that realizes a concept of what this object is meant to be, but nevertheless the finality of its form must appear as spontaneous, as if the work of art were a product of nature.

The doctrine of genius can be seen even as a reconstruction of the conditions on which the results of an intentional activity can be considered as natural, in fact the genius is defined as »an innate mental predisposition

fürstliches Schloss zu Mainz«, 1990, Hrsg. von G. Funke, Bouvier, Bonn 1992, pp. 809–819.

¹⁶ AA, V 350, 224.

¹⁷ With respect to the assigned length of this presentation I cannot discuss Kant's arguments on the nature of the symbolic relation and its difference to the schematic in detail. It will be sufficient to recall that what makes an object of sensible intuition a symbol of another object, which is not given to the senses, is a similarity in the reflection on both. Thanks to that, we can transfer the mere rule of reflection from one to the other object. Although we cannot know what this object is in itself, we can know, at least, what this second object would be for us. Kant throws light on the analogy which exists between the reflection on beauty, namely the aesthetic contemplation, and the moral judgment. In virtue of that analogy, the beautiful object can be considered as a sensible object, although it is a symbolic exhibition of the autonomy of the will, which, furthermore, escapes our cognition in its supersensible nature. In Kant's words: in taste »judgment does not find itself subjected to a heteronomy from empirical laws, as it does elsewhere in empirical judging- concerning objects of such a pure liking it legislates to itself, just as reason does regarding the power of desire« AA, V 353, 229.

(*ingenium*) *trough which* nature gives the rule to art.«¹⁸ The artist produces under the guide of the concept of purpose, but his talent is not displayed only by the carrying out of the concept of what his work must be (a church, a palace, a determined subject of a painting). However, the peculiarity of the genial work takes place through, what Kant calls, aesthetics ideas, namely presentations of imagination that, even if they belong to the exhibition of a concept, surpass this concept, »make us add to a concept the thoughts of much that is ineffable.«¹⁹ Imagination produces a surplus of intuitions that can never be included in a determinate concept.²⁰

In that excess of the activity of imagination, the freedom of imagination finds its expression. Thus, we can see that in the production of the works of art the spontaneous accordance between freedom of the imagination and lawfulness of understanding takes place thanks to the proportion of cognitive powers that »can be brought about only by the subject's nature.«²¹

According to my analysis, it seems important to emphasise that the aesthetic ideas are the intuitive *matter* of genius' imagination, but this matter must have a communicable *form*, so that beauty can arise. In other words, to genius must also belong taste with the help of which he finds a form that is adequate to represent such a material. Therefore the creation of art can be understood as the forming of the rich material given to imagination, which further excludes the interpretation according to which Kant's

18 AA, V 307, 174.

19 AA, V 316, 185.

20 The aesthetic idea is presented as »counterpart (*pendant*) of a *rational idea*«; both because it ventures to give sensible expression to rational ideas, and because it is a product of imagination, which »emulates the example of reason in reaching for a maximum« AA, V 314, 183. It can represent what can be found in the experience »with a completeness for which no example can be found in nature« (ibid.). Ideas of reason and aesthetic ideas are analogous since both exceed the bounds of experience and both cannot produce a determined knowledge of objects, although just for opposite grounds: »just as in the case of rational idea the imagination with its intuitions does not reach the given concept, so in the case of an aesthetics idea the understanding with its concepts never reaches the entire inner intuition that the imagination has and connects with a given presentation« AA, V 343, 216. For an account of Kant's theory of aesthetic Idea and its relevance to the modern art, see: P.N. Stallknecht, *Kant's Concept of Aesthetic Idea and the Appreciation of Modern Art*, in »Revue internationale de Philosophie«, 29 (1975), pp. 175–196.

21 AA, V 318, 186.

account of aesthetic experience is reduced to a production and reception of only pure, empty, forms. The form is not only the pure perceptive element, but merely an »expressional medium,«²² that is the particular, original relationship between the form of the work and the content to which it gives expression. To find an adequate expression, a structure, a unitary disposition for the aesthetic ideas is the proper task of a genius, that is, without the proper form remains only fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*). We must consider that the power of representing the experience in its completeness, which characterises aesthetic ideas, can be realised only through an adequate formal composition.

All of the above presented aims of the discourse can be summarized by the following Kant's sentence: »what is essential in all fine art is the form that is purposive for our observation and judging, rather than the matter of sensation (i.e. charm or emotions). For the pleasure we take in a purposive form is also culture, and it attunes the spirit to ideas.«²³

2. Design and colours in the Kant's theory of painting

When one considers that beauty consists neither in the sensible content, nor in the conceptual significances, but in the form, one could not fail to admit the leading role of drawing as structure, the order, limitation, and organisation of a multiplicity of elements in space, with respect to the colour in the theory of painting. In fact Kant says that in painting and in all the visual arts »insofar they are fine arts, design is what is essential.«²⁴ It is interesting to note that by affirming the priority of design on the basis of independent theoretical premises, Kant places himself within the long tradition -from the Tuscan Renaissance to the Neoclassicism- that considers

22 For a further discussion on the semantic relevance of the form see: G. Tomasi, *Signi-fi-ca-re con le forme. Valore simbolico del bello ed espressività della pittura in Kant*, Ancona 1997, in particular chapter II, pp. 52–78.

23 AA, V 326, 195.

24 AA, V 225, 71. For a detailed treatment of the fine art in Kant, see: P. Guyer, *Kant's Conception of Fine Art*, in »The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism«, 52 (1994), pp. 275–285. On painting in particular, see: G. Tomasi 1997.

the design to be the intellectual ground of painting and its most important element.²⁵

In this context, he grounds in his own theories what seems to be only a recovery of the already existing tradition: as a painting in proper sign, every beautiful disposition of the objects in the space creates formal relations which have value only for the eye that perceive them, without a referring to a determined object and without any purpose. Like the landscape gardening, the living painting of some luxurious party, the decorations of room, as well as the art of dressing can be judged as beautiful, because the essential referent of an aesthetic predicate is the apprehension of the form. It is not important that something determined is represented, that is the sense of the absence of a concept, only the formal structure of the composition, moves the faculties of knowledge into the free play.²⁶

Considering the design as the form of a picture, and according to him the most important aspect of painting, Kant consequently ascribes to colours not more than the subordinate role to »illuminate the outline.«²⁷ This is why the sensation of colours is produced by the impression of the organs of sight; belonging only to the charming »they can indeed make the object itself vivid to the sense, they cannot make it beautiful and worthy of being beheld.«²⁸ The colours can give pleasure and create attraction, emotion, but they cannot be the object of a pure aesthetic judgment. Therefore

25 For a generally historical introduction to this question, see: A. Blunt, *Le teorie artistiche in Italia dal Rinascimento al Manierismo*, Torino 1966. In the second half of the 18th century, the priority of the design was supported and diffused by J. J. Winckelmann and A.R. Mengs, on the Kant's consciousness and on his essential agreement with their theories, see: P. Giordanetti, *Kant und Winckelmann: Beobachtungen zu einer Quelle der Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft*, in »Proceeding of the Eighth International Kant Congress«, Memphis, 1995 Vol. II, 463–471; see also: G. Tomasi, *Il contorno di Dibutade. Riflessioni sulla concezione kantiana della »Critica Giudizio«*, in »Dipingere l'idea. Interpretazioni tra filosofia e pittura« a cura di F. Biasutti, Ancona, 1996, pp.13–48.

26 On the possibility of finding in Kant's theory of the form a theoretical ground for the abstract painting, see: G. Kübler, *Kunstrezeption als Ästhetischer Erfahrung. Kants Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft als methodische Grundlage einer Erörterung gegenständlicher und gegenstandloser Malerei*, Kümmerle, Göttingen 1983.

27 AA, V 225, 71.

28 Ibid.

its rule is conditioned by the requirement of the form, »and even when the charm is admitted it is still only the form that refines the colours.«²⁹

When this dualism between form and material contents and the view that colour is the result of an immediate sense-impression is applied to theory of painting, then it follows that color can only be regarded as agreeable. Kant suggests that colours could be traced to a formal intuition on two conditions. The first condition is the admission of the Euler's undulatory theory.³⁰ According to this theory, colours (and tones too) are vibrations of the aether (*pulsus æeris*) in uniform temporal sequence, that means that they are a perceived multiplicity which could be composed by the imagination in an intuition. The second condition is that the subject perceives »not only by the senses, the effects that these vibrations have on the excitement of the organ, i.e the matter, but also by the reflection, the regular play of the impressions.«³¹ If Kant agrees with Euler's scientific studies, he can not be surely looking for the second condition. Even if the second condition were true, it would only be valid for simple colours. This is because the sensation that corresponds to the perception of simple colors is characterized by an undisturbed and uninterrupted uniformity.³² This uninterrupted uniformity pertains only to a form and it should be abstracted from the specific quality of the sensation, namely the type of colour or tone, if any is present. That means that, if the colours could be judged as beautiful, this would not be due to their specificity, their being

29 Ibid.

30 Leonhard Euler (1707–83), a Swiss mathematician, physicist and physiologist. Among his works see: L. Euler, *Briefe an eine deutsche Prinzessin über verschiedene Gegenstände aus der Physik und Philosophie*. Philosophische Auswahl, hrsg. v. G. Krober, Berlin 1987.

31 AA, V 224, 71.

32 That is a wide-debated question. This is because on one hand Kant's treatment of colour and sound presupposes Euler's point of view and in his scientific works Kant speaks of it very favourably. On the other hand, in the first and second edition of the *third Critique*, with respect to the undulatory nature of colour and sound and our faculty to perceive the vibrations Kant writes as follows: »*woran ich doch gar sehr zweifle*«. But, in the third edition he seems to change his opinion and writes: »*woran ich doch gar nicht zweifle*«. On this point, see the note by W. Windelband, AA V 527–29; see also T.E. Uehling 1971, 22–26. One can find a wide ranging discussion on this question in P. Giordanetti, *Kant e la musica*, Milano, 2001. I agree with the solution given by Giordanetti.

orange or violate, but rather due to the fact that they can be brought into special-temporal construct, i.e., a form.

3. Fichte's Theory of Beauty

Fichte takes up the conception of form developed by Kant and he argues like Kant that beauty can only be the beauty of form. Fichte's theory of beauty is not related to Kant's reflection on the possibility of a pure aesthetic judgment. As we have seen, for Kant, aesthetic judgment is neither cognitive nor practical but, rather, characterized by suggests original harmony with the understanding and the practical reason.

Fichte inserts the problem of beauty into the practical question, the theme of the *Practical Philosophy*. The task of this work is to resolve the contradiction between the pure and itself-determining activity (*selbstbestimmende Tätigkeit*) of the absolute I (*absolutes Ich*) and the representing activity (*vorstellende Tätigkeit*) of the knowing I (*Ich als Intelligenz*). The latter is receptive and as such, is always conditioned by the not I.³³

To solve this contradiction Fichte introduces a concept of Striving (*Streben*), which is a practical activity and which tries to make the Not-I dependent on the I. This striving is the essential peculiarity of the subjectivity. It is a self-activity which can never be completely achieved. It reproduces itself by itself, its completion and its consequently ending would represent the end of life. On Fichte's account, the human being is not free but instead his essential being is to strive to be free. This striving is the infinite self-activity that can be defined as the power of desire as well. This power of desire cannot be differentiated into the lower and the higher one. In fact, in Fichte's practical philosophy both these powers are united. They

33 GA, II 3, 181–182. On an account of the relation between a practical moment and a theoretical moment in this phase of Fichte's philosophical reflection, see H.G. von Manz, *Die Funktion praktischer Momente für Grundelemente der theoretischen Vernunft in Fichtes Manuskripten »Eigene Meditationen über Elementarphilosophie« und »Praktische Philosophie«*, in »Fichte Studien«, IX (1997), pp. 83–99. On an account of the following development of this question in Fichte, see: G. Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy. The Original duplicity of Intelligence and Will*, Cambridge, 1998.

can only be distinguished as two different ways in which the self-activity of the I shows itself; the first one as a dark and unconscious and the second one as a clear and conscious.³⁴

Fichte's philosophical strategy is, in this context, to retrieve all the levels of the theoretical dependence of the I described in the *Own Meditations*, and to oppose to them the spontaneous activity of striving. The agreeable (*Angenehm*), as well as the pleasure of beauty, the feeling of the sublime and the Will represent different steps of the striving's liberation from the theoretical limitation.³⁵

In Fichte's theory of beauty, as well as in Kant's, the pleasure of beauty is occasioned by the apprehension (*Auffassung*) of a form, and the form is the subjective product of the imagination, which combines (*setzt zusammen*) the given sensations in space and time.

By accomplishing this task, the imagination is already a self-activity, but the order of the given sensation is forced (*erzwungen*). With respect to this order, the I depends on the not I. The striving must liberate itself from this order of things in space and time. That becomes possible when one accepts the distinction that Kant has introduced in the *Critique of Judgment*, namely the distinction between theoretical and aesthetic consideration. Regarding this distinction Fichte asserts: »as far as the form of an object is related to the representing truth, it is given; but as far as it is related to the aesthetic intuition, it is like a form produced by the absolute self-activity, according to a certain rule of the power of the striving.«³⁶

When the form of an object is considered without a knowing aim, namely free from the objective references and as produced by the absolute spontaneity of the striving of the imagination, it may happen that the I is

34 R. Picardi, in a thorough and careful essay, shows the early development of Fichte's practical Philosophy beginning with his conviction that the reason alone can not determine the will. That is why he acknowledges the rule of the sensibility for the determination of the Will and revalues the lower power of desire. See R. Picardi, *Progetto di sistema e concezione etica nel primo Fichte: dal »Saggio di una critica ad ogni rivelazione« alla »Praktische Philosophie«*, in »Annali dell'istituto italiano per gli studi storici«, XVI (1999), pp.363–425. On an account of the influences of the practical philosophy of the *Aufklärung* to the genesis of Fichte's thought see: J-F. Goubet, *Il giovane Fichte e l'idea di filosofia pratica universale*, In »Rivista di storia della filosofia«, II (2004), pp. 435–445.

35 GA, II 3, 206.

36 GA, II 3, 207.

represented (*dargestellt*) as the cause of a form of the not-I. This representation originates spontaneously and an unexpected pleasure, which is not an immediate product of a sense-impression, reveals something deep inside the human being, namely our practical determination, our striving to be free from the conditioning of external things and our determination of them. However, the striving is not completely satisfied because no synthesis of the imagination is completely free but »only analogous to freedom.«³⁷

Fichte takes up the essential elements of the formal conception of Kant's theory of beauty: the conception of form as a temporal-spatial order and the idea of pleasure, as something that is occasioned by the composing of the form of an object without cognitive intentions. Furthermore, just like for Kant in the third Critique the formal pleasure reveals the essential character of the subject, i.e., its original harmony with the natural world, for Fichte, the formal pleasure exhibits in a form of an object the causality of the striving.

The most important result of the inclusion of the theory of beauty into the practical question is the difference between the form's objective component, i.e., its reference to an object which results in knowledge, and the form's subjective element, i.e., the imagination's free activity. For Fichte, the subjective element of the form is not in harmony but is rather opposed to the objective element. The form of beauty represents the breakdown of the limiting activity of the theoretical imagination. This one has as its target the knowledge of determined objects. The striving of imagination in beauty does not stop at the limitation and organization of intuition in time and space, but it aspires to give a greater unity to a singular form and among different forms. In other words, the goal of the striving is to make us independent from things. This is the reason why it aims to dissolve temporal-spatial differences and limitations. But the form, as we have seen, is constituted by these kinds of differences and limitations. It follows that the beautiful form is regarded as »form without form«³⁸. This idea of the form tries to express the most important feature of beauty: something beautiful makes everything contradictory that from the theoretical point

37 GA, II 3, 209.

38 GA, II 3, 211. For F. Moiso this conception of the form involves a high level of creativity not only in the art creation, but also in the art fruition. See F. Moiso, *Natura e cultura nel primo Fichte*, Milano, 1979, p. 231.

of view is determined and secure.³⁹ Thus, beauty shows that the order in which the Not-I determines the I is also naïve and, at the same time, it contributes, as an element of the practical philosophy, to the breakdown of that illusion and to the building of another, freer order. What one feels by encountering a beautiful object is not a completely positive pleasure Kant describes in the *third Critique* as »feeling at home in the world«. We cannot stay (*weilen*) in the contemplation of beauty that does not reassure us in our capacity to comprehend the given world. On the contrary, we are immediately bewildered with respect to the ordinary consciousness and we are driven to contrast the opposition of the not-I and to search more and more for unity and the disintegration of determination and limitation. This is the seal and the guarantee of the possibility of an objective knowledge. With regard to the own limitation of the I as knowing Fichte says: »The limitation concerns us a knowing entity; it is not so that our knowledge is limited; it rather becomes just a *knowledge* through those necessary limitations, it receives unity and determination; it is instead so that our *self-activity* is all limited by the determined *knowing's task*, which is assigned to it.«⁴⁰

4. »Schweben« of the shapes and »Überfließen« of the Colours

The notion of the beautiful form as »form without form« brings Fichte's conception of beauty near to the Kant's conception of the feeling for sublime. He also uses the adjectives »mathematical« and »dynamical«, with which Kant denotes the two kinds of sublime. In this way Kant distinguishes between two kinds of beauty: the one of the form in space and the other of the form in time. Fichte calls the first one mathematical beauty and the second dynamical beauty. Nevertheless, this distinction does not refer directly to Kant's theory of the sublime, but merely corresponds to Kant's difference between shape as form in space and play as form in time.⁴¹

39 GA, II 3, 200.

40 GA, II 3, 188.

41 Regarding the hypothesis of a »deep solidarity between Beauty and Sublime in the works of art« in Kant's theories see: G. Tomasi, *Significare con le forme. Valore sim-*

The design or shape belongs to mathematical beauty. This is because for Fichte the form as order of perceiving sensation in space is an outline (*Umriss*) that can be reduced to a geometric form; but this one is not constructed as in geometry but, rather, apprehended as a unity. According to Fichte's conception of a beautiful form as »form without form«, what makes this unity relevant from an aesthetic point of view is its indeterminate character, its floating (*schweben*) among many different forms. The form is loosened from its objective determination and it is so much undetermined. For example, Fichte asks: »Why is a rose more beautiful as a certain (nearly round) yellow flower?«. He answers that the reason is in the oval form, which floats between a circle and a rectangle.⁴²

At this point of his reflection Fichte admits that Kant is right in thinking that colouring (*Farbengebung*) is only an additional element referring to the consideration of beauty of the form in space. But, that does not implicate any negative consideration by Fichte: unlike Kant, Fichte does not have the problem of preserving the purity of judgement from every emotion that can corrupt it. He does not have the problem of the purity of beauty at all but, rather, the problem of in fact the wide and unitary conception of the power of desire. This conception permits to consider the sphere of inclinations and emotions as belonging to the properly practical question. That also means that the typical pleasure of beauty, in Kant's words the favour (*Gunst*), which Fichte also includes into the practical philosophy, is not qualitative but only gradually different from the agreeable (*Angenehm*) of inclinations. The power to reveal the transcendental structure of the subject is no longer an exclusive prerogative of the pure aesthetic pleasure but, rather, the agreeable helps emphasize the effect of beauty.⁴³ In particular, the emotion (*Rührung*) shows the same structure

bolico del bello ed espressività della pittura in Kant, Ancona, 1997, pp. 106–115, cit. p.113. See also R. Wicks, *Kant on Fine Art: Artistic Sublimity Shaped by Beauty*, »The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism«, 53 (1995), pp. 189–193.

⁴² GA, II 3, 212.

⁴³ The empirical sensation of pleasure, if considered theoretically, demonstrates a dependence of the subject with respect to an object that affects (*affiziert*) the senses. If considered from an aesthetic point of view, it only relates to the state of the subject, as feeling (*Gefühl*) of pleasure, and it shows how the striving takes place as spontaneity of the receptivity (*Spontaneität der Receptivität*). A sensible pleasure originates an inclination and in this inclination the receptivity wants to have certain sensations. The »I« tries to give to itself form, the receptivity to spontaneity.

that is typical of pleasure: a rapid following of different, contrary moods; beauty and emotion are so near, that Fichte says: »there can be emotions which are not beautiful ([...]). But a work of art, which does not move, is not beautiful,«⁴⁴ and he admits how difficult it is, with respect to emotions to distinguish between the agreeable and beauty; that is to say that, according to the foregoing systematic statements, the colouring belongs to the beauty of a painting.

That can be affirmed in the background of the unity of sensible pleasure and beauty as both represent the different degrees of the striving's intensity. However, in the context of his treatment of the dynamical beauty and on the basis of his own conception of the form as »form and not-form«, Fichte claims that the colouring and especially mixed colours, namely the disappearance of one in another (*ineinander Überfließen der Farben*), can be considered beautiful.⁴⁵ This aspect shows not only that the striving breaks down the forms constructed by the imagination but also that it dissolves the condition of all the forms, the fundamental character of our finite being, namely time.⁴⁶

As we have seen the dynamical beauty belongs to the composition of the sensations in time. According to the *Own Meditations* that evokes the Transcendental Aesthetic of the *Critique of the Pure Reason*, time has only one dimension: it flows horizontally from past to the future, or better, time does not flow in itself but in the manifold of sensations flows in time. We become conscious of time only through the modification of the I: we perceive that one modification is at one time and the other at another time. All of the determinations of time are limitations of its totality, that is, the imagination limits every moment *b* through a preceding sensation –*b* and a following one –*b*. Thus, every moment is dispelled necessarily by the next one.⁴⁷

The result of this »*thätiges Leiden*« is a promotion of the life and the increase of the striving.

44 GA, II 3, 215.

45 GA, II 3, 220.

46 Kant treats with analogous consequences the mathematical Sublime, see AA, V 257–260, 114–117. On this question see also R. Makkreel, *Imagination and Temporality in Kant's Theory of the Sublime*, in »Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism«, 42 (1984), pp. 303–315; and F. Chiereghin, *Il problema della libertà in Kant*, Pubblicazioni di Verifiche, Trento 1991, pp 150–159.

47 GA, II 3, 216–220.

Now, Fichte denies the possibility, which is only problematically admitted by Kant, that the organs of the sight are sharp enough to perceive a multiplicity of vibrations. Therefore, one immediate sensation of a pure colour does not have a form in time. On the contrary, the perceiving of mixed-colours, in which one can see that one colour disappears in another, can be beautiful because, in this case, the imagination strives to position two different sensations, *b* and $-b$, in one moment without distinguishing when the one starts and the other ends. This is to say that, given that every sensation determines a moment, we have two moments in one. In fact, these different times are together (*zugleichsein*), which clashes with the essential structure of time: the *Nacheinandersein* of the moments.

The one in another disappearance of colors is beauty of the form as »form without form,« but the form at issue is not simply a form of an object but the form of the internal sense: time. In this kind of beauty (that belongs to music too) Fichte shows, how dialectic tension in its freedom flows into sensibility. This striving of imagination is something like the violence to temporality and represents another higher step of the manifestation of the I's freedom.

We have seen that, in Kant's theory of beauty, the unity of nature and freedom of a sensible being and a supersensible being shows itself in the pleasure through a complex play of relations and analogies. In Fichte, on the contrary, such a unity is the starting point. What the transcendental philosopher discovers in the feeling of pleasure is the peculiar feature of that unity i.e. its conflicts and its dynamics. The aesthetic theory of the form as »form without form« and the consideration of the one in another disappearance of colors is the context within which one can understand what Fichte means when he says that the human nature is sublime. In our striving to create another free form, in the form that disappears, reveals itself the struggle against the existing world that is ready-made as well as our eternal task and our destination to be free. As a consequence of this struggle, the danger of losing comes to light and with it fear and hope. But fear and hope projects us into the future, and, for Fichte, one experiences future, generally speaking, only aesthetically. He says that »the fields of the sensations is the present; the fields of the thought, namely, the one of the theoretical reason, is the past, the future is merely a product of the practical reason.«⁴⁸

48 GA, II 3, 189.

The *Überfließen* of colours represent an attempt to dissolve in the sensation the actual moment of the sensation of one colour, i.e. the striving to realize the future dimension, the freedom, in a present moment, in a ready-made reality. From this tension that we called »violence« results the dissolution of all time.

Moreover, Fichte's interest for a-at first glance- marginal aspect of the aesthetic experience, as the one in another disappearance, testifies to his attention to all what belongs to life, that is all sensible and emotional elements of the human being as human. Fichte's consideration of colours reaffirms and strengthens the question with which he starts the proper argument of the *Practical Philosophy*: »Why Kant's embitterment against the simple pleasure of the senses?«⁴⁹.

49 GA, II 3, 192.

Critical Epistemology and Idealist Metaphysics in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–1800)

Steven Hoeltzel

Does the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* defend, on duly rigorous theoretical grounds, any interestingly *metaphysical* form of idealism? Nowadays we may well doubt that such a thing is even possible. There is, after all, no longer any real question as to the early *Wissenschaftslehre*'s profound continuity with the epistemologically oriented transcendental or ›Critical‹ idealism of Kant. Thus, it is hard to see how Fichte's system, being one whose founding principles isolate the basic *transcendental* conditions of human cognition and volition, could defensibly eventuate in far-reaching, non-analytic metaphysical claims backed by properly theoretical warrants. (At minimum, these would be warrants that do not presuppose any distinctly ethical commitments. Perhaps the post-Kantian can always try to get some metaphysical mileage out of the dubious device of ›practical postulation,‹ but the question here is what the *Wissenschaftslehre* could be understood to establish absent any such expedient.) Of course, that it now seems hard to see how Fichte's system could sensibly support a theory-driven general metaphysics may well come as something of a relief, thanks to the tendency among more metaphysically-minded readers to offer, not entirely without reason, rather embarrassing interpretations. (Thus, for example, Fichte's philosophy is sometimes seen as a one-sidedly ›subjective‹ or dictatorially ›practical‹ idealism committed to the apotheosis of the thinking, willing subject and, therewith, the reduction or relegation of all seemingly ego-independent entities to merely intra-subjective status or instrumental standing.)¹

1 For an especially momentous example, see the writings of F. H. Jacobi, especially *Jacobi to Fichte* (1799), in F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, eds. Friedrich Köppen and Friedrich

Still and all, I argue that Fichte means, indeed, to demonstrate that for purposes of comprehending the basic nature and structure of the reality that environs and engenders finite intellect and will, a certain sort of metaphysical idealism is, given the available alternatives, the rationally superior position, on properly theoretical grounds. The metaphysical idealism that I have in mind here is not a solipsistic ›speculative egoism‹ of the sort to which everyone objects.² Instead, it is the view that what truly and ultimately exists is a plurality of instances of spontaneously self-articulating, elementally aspiring intelligence – that is to say, of *rational beings* (or states or activities thereof), as the essence and the elements of rational being are figured in Fichtean philosophy. Such a metaphysical position is not merely logically compatible with the transcendental-epistemological argumentation of the early *Wissenschaftslehre*; it is actually cast in terms of that argumentation's key conclusions. Indeed, assuming the essential soundness of said transcendental-epistemological argumentation, the aforementioned metaphysics is epistemically underwritten thereby, and substantially so. So much so, I think, that Fichte could arrive at that plainly metaphysical position without employing any problematically ›pre-Critical‹ or ›dogmatic‹ modes of argument. In that case, the post-Kantian return to theory-driven general metaphysics is, indeed, inaugurated by the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* – not, however, as a result of Fichte's proceeding beyond the pale of properly Critical, circumspectly transcendental philosophizing, but owing instead to his quite incisive, even artful exploitation of the argumentative resources distinctive of transcendental theory itself.

Roth (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer: 1812–1825. Reprint: Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: 1976): vol. III, 1–57. English translation in F. H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, tr. and ed. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill University Press: 1994): 497–536. Hereafter, »MPW« refers to *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*.

- 2 The term »speculative egoism« actually comes from Jacobi's earlier critique of Kant. See the Supplement to *David Hume*: »On Transcendental Idealism« (1787): Jacobi, *Werke*, II: 310, MPW: 338. It is plain from later texts (*Jacobi to Fichte* especially) that he would apply the term to the *Wissenschaftslehre* as well. The meaning of the term should become rather clearer in section 3, if it is not clear enough already.

1. *Experience and its transcendental-epistemological explanation*

According to Fichte, the project proper to philosophy *per se*, the very »task of philosophy,« is to provide an illuminating explanation of the occurrence and the content of states of consciousness whose immanent contents evidently are *not* a function of free thinking or willing. As Fichte puts it, »Philosophy has to display the basis or foundation of all *experience*.«³ (Hereafter, by »experience« I shall mean experience in the rather rarefied sense just specified.) Fichte further holds that ultimately only two approaches to explaining experience are available, and that of those two, only one is genuinely viable. The two approaches are naturalism (which he calls »dogmatism«) and Critical or transcendental epistemology (which he identifies with »idealism«).⁴

Naturalism undertakes to account for experience on the basis of things' objectively observable properties and merely »mechanical« (unconscious and ateleological) modes of efficacy: naturalism »treats the I merely as a product of things« and purports to make all understanding, all aspiration »comprehensible on the basis of an efficacious action of the thing in itself.«⁵ The alternative approach, Critical or transcendental epistemology, sets out to show, instead, that »everything which occurs in our mind can be completely explained and comprehended on the basis of the mind itself«⁶ – can be wholly accounted for, in other words, without figuring any act or aspect of the mind as the mechanically-engendered effect of any entity extrinsic to the mind. Clearly, each of these approaches initiates the explanatory enterprise in a way that begs the basic question against its opponent.⁷ Nevertheless, on Fichte's account, transcendental epistemology eventually emerges as the sole successful strategy, principally because only it possesses the conceptual resources required for the explanatory project's systematic completion.⁸ On Fichte's view, consciousness, as an »*immediate*

3 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 424; IWL: 8.

4 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 425–26; IWL: 10–11.

5 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 431, 435 (cf. 436); IWL: 16, 20 (cf. 21).

6 Review of *Aenesidemus* (1794): SW, I: 15; EPW: 69.

7 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 429ff; IWL: 15ff.

8 Fichte also argues that the transcendental-epistemological approach has rather greater initial plausibility than does naturalism, on the grounds that transcendental

unity of being and seeing,« is irreducible to any amount or arrangement, however rarefied or recondite, of non-conscious particulars and efficient causation; therefore, experience cannot be systematically accounted for along naturalistic lines.⁹

By contrast with naturalism, Fichte's transcendental-epistemological account »explains the determinations of consciousness by referring them to the acting of the intellect, which it considers to be something absolute and active, not something passive.«¹⁰ This is the so-called »absolute I« – »absolute« in the sense that its being, *qua* specifically *rational* being, originates in and supervenes upon its own positing of itself:¹¹ its non-sensory singling-itself-out as the transcendental subject (not any empirically determinate object) of understanding and aspiration. Because such self-positing *is* the way of being properly basic to the finite rational being as such,

epistemology's postulated *explanans* – a thinking, willing subject – is an entity of a kind one instance of which »can be shown to be present within consciousness,« whereas the naturalist's »thing in itself« is something the existence of which could never be equally evident. He does not, however, construe this initial epistemic asymmetry as a good reason for rejecting naturalism out of hand. Instead, he says, naturalism should stand or fall with its capacity (or lack thereof) to explain the occurrence and the character of experience. [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 428–29; IWL: 13–14.

- 9 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 435ff; IWL: 20ff. Unfortunately for Fichte, from the impossibility of any thoroughgoing explanatory *reduction* of the mental to the physical (which is all that Fichte explicitly urges in arguing against »dogmatism«), it does not follow that there is no way whatsoever in which mental phenomena can be accounted for naturalistically. Even supposing that no facts about mental phenomena are logically entailed by any amount of information concerning physical structure and function, it might still be the case that mental phenomena are one and all causally dependent upon unconscious entities of some sort – in which case, the correct explanation of experience would be a naturalistic, not an idealistic one. Perhaps Fichte would urge, in reply to this objection, that only outright reductive explanations are acceptable for philosophical purposes. This, however, would seem certain to amount either to a merely terminological gambit that leaves the substantive issues untouched, or to the ill-advised *ad hoc* or *a priori* embrace of an unduly stringent, thus theoretically unfruitful, criterion for adequate explanation. In any case, for the sake of uncluttered reconstruction, in what follows I present Fichte's overall argument to idealism as if the ingredient argument against naturalism were unproblematic.

10 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 440; IWL: 25.

11 *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95): SW, I: 97; SK: 98.

this philosophically postulated activity cannot be construed as conditioned by any more basic states or acts of that being, *qua* active intelligence.¹² Nor can the act of self-positing be figured, except on pain of lapsing into an untenable naturalism, as mechanically induced or engendered by any entity extrinsic to the self-positing subject in question.¹³

The finite rational being is not understood to be ›absolute‹ in the sense that its self-constituting activity of self-positing is neither limited nor conditioned in any way; nor is it understood to be ›absolute‹ in the sense that its activities of positing (of which self-positing is but the most basic) could one and all be arbitrarily structured or ordered.¹⁴ Were that the case, a detailed and illuminating explanation of experience's determinate immanent features and structures would not be forthcoming, given that »nothing determinate can be derived from what is indeterminate.«¹⁵ Accordingly, »what idealism proposes is the following: The intellect acts; but, as a consequence of its very nature, it can act only in a certain, specific manner.«¹⁶ And »since the intellect itself is the ultimate ground of all explanation, this must be a type of acting which is determined by the intellect itself and by its own nature, not by anything outside of the intellect.«¹⁷

On Fichte's account, even as it ›absolutely‹ posits itself, the finite rational being finds itself subject to a certain sort of limitation. More precisely, it finds that not only does it engage in ›pure‹ thinking and willing (self-positing being the most primordial instance of each); it also has »immediate feelings«: simple sensations or affective states, understood as wholly intra-subjective episodes that sheer *self*-positing does not account for and cannot efface.¹⁸ ›Pure‹ self-positing and ›immediate‹ feeling are then understood variously to embody and engender active-epistemic tendencies and tensions that spur the progressive complexification of the rational being's representation of itself and its world. This transcendental-epistemic dynamic issues in a qualitatively and categorially complex, unitary experience in which the subject's initially-inchoate »immediate feelings« are

12 *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95): SW, I: 95; SK: 96.

13 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 440; IWL: 25–26.

14 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 440–41; IWL: 25–27.

15 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 440; IWL: 26.

16 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 441; IWL: 26.

17 Ibid.

18 Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 488–91; IWL: 74–76.

ordered and elaborated upon via various self-originated, abstract organizing forms – that is to say, *rational* forms – for example, the structurally polarized, abstractly articulated self-world differentiation-relation, which is in no sense ›immediately felt‹,¹⁹ yet which infuses all experience as a result of ineluctable transcendental-epistemic traits and tendencies characteristic of finite rational being *per se*.

A thoroughly worked-out transcendental-epistemological explanation of experience will thus be one that discloses all of experience's underlying or ingredient active-epistemic conditions (pure self-positing and immediate feeling being but the most basic ones), and that clearly models their co-ordination in the constitution of experience as such. In Fichte's words, such an account »must arrive at the system of all necessary representations. In other words, its result must be equivalent to experience as a whole«²⁰ – meaning, I take it, that said explanation must account for both the felt recalcitrance of certain sensory and affective states, and the experiential ineluctability of various more abstract forms of ordering and organization, structural or categorial. *And*, so as not to lapse into naturalism, the explanation must proceed without postulating, at any point in the process, any entities extrinsic to the spontaneously self-positing subject.

Following Kant, Fichte holds that experience is inwardly organized around notions and norms for which purely sensory and affective awareness cannot epistemically account. Thus, according to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the non-sensory forms and norms that order and orient all experience are ideational outputs of transcendental-epistemic activities that variously embody and equilibrate the active-epistemic tendencies and tensions expressed and engendered by pure self-positing and immediate feeling. So, for example, the experientially pervasive, phenomenologically immanent differentiation-relation between self and world is treated neither as something immediately revealed by the rational being's discovery of its own intrinsic limitations, nor as the subjective correlate of an objective structure whose reality accounts for said discovery. Instead, it is understood as a differentiation-relation originally posited by the transcendental subject – not to say ultimately countenanced by the Critical philo-

19 *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95): SW, I: 104; SK: 104–5.

20 [First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 446; IWL: 31.

sopher – for the sake of epistemically accommodating empirical phenomena that ›check‹ the finite rational being's pure self-positing.

On Fichte's account, the latter, empirical phenomena explain both the general recalcitrance and the given qualitative content of experience's sensory and affective ingredients. Instances of the *Anstoß* (or ›check‹ to the subject's non-sensory power of positing, a ›check‹ exerted by stubborn states of »*feeling*: sweet, red, cold, etc.«)²¹ and the *Aufforderung* (or ›summons‹ whereby the self-asserting subject feels itself subject to something on the order of an ethical appeal)²² – are seen as sufficient to account for the given qualitative dimensions of experience as such.²³ They are also viewed, in effect, as epistemically necessary conditions for the epistemically subsequent organization of qualitative data via reason's self-articulated abstract forms and norms. Thus, given a transcendental account of experience's ineluctable organizing forms, the explanation of experience concludes with the postulation of an *Anstoß* or *Aufforderung* whose determinate character accounts for whatever recalcitrant qualitative contents are also in question: »all *transcendental* explanation comes to an end with immediate feeling.«²⁴ (Of course, the transcendental subject posits an extra-subjective origin for its recalcitrant feelings, but, again, said act of positing is an active-epistemic moment in experience's transcendental elaboration – not, for Fichte, a component of its critical-epistemological explanation.)²⁵

One might suppose that a more illuminating explanation would go on to tie the qualitative determinacy of every *Anstoß* and *Aufforderung* to some correspondingly specific power or property of some object extrinsic to the mind. From the Fichtean standpoint, however, such a move would seem to yield no net gain in properly comprehensive understanding. For

21 Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 490; IWL: 75.

22 *Foundations of Natural Right* (1795/6): SW, III: 32–35; FNR, 31–33.

23 For more on these concepts, see Daniel Breazeale, »Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self« in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (eds), *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press: 1995): 87–117.

24 Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 488–90; IWL: 74–76. The passage specifically cited above occurs at SW, I: 490; IWL: 75.

25 Fichte: »The empirical I obtains its universe by continuing to analyze and to explain its own state; the philosopher obtains his science by observing the laws in accordance with which this process of explanation proceeds.« Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 490; IWL: 75.

one, it would not actually reduce the amount of unexplained determinacy that the philosopher confronts. Instead, it would simply relocate it, shifting it from states of subjectivity into a newly-postulated order of supra-subjective things. And if the principal *explanandum* is experience, if all naturalistic attempts to account for experience are ultimately implausible, and if a transcendental-epistemological explanation constructed on Fichtean foundations can indeed be completed, then any postulation of extra-mental objects looks to be an ill-founded ontological extravagance.

More on that point momentarily. For present purposes, the key point is this: on Fichte's account, there is exactly one duly comprehensive and compact explanation of experience, and that explanation begins and ends with reference to one and only one sort of entity: a living mind, passively conscious of its own unchosen states (that is to say, finite) and driven to elaborate upon its unchosen states by bringing their contents under its own self-originated, non-sensory, organizing forms (in a word: rational). For Fichte, reference to entities of *precisely* that sort is necessary, supposing that a tenable explanation of experience is to be provided. And reference to entities of that sort *and only that sort* is sufficient for purposes of that project.

Suppose that Fichte is correct in that. In that case, some non-trivial metaphysical claims straightforwardly follow. And some much more contentious and far-reaching metaphysical claims begin to look profoundly more plausible, in that case, than do their negations.

2. *The inference to immaterialism and libertarianism*

Suppose that a transcendental-epistemological explanation of experience can be completed along the lines laid out above. Suppose, too, that no comparably coherent and comprehensive account of experience can be constructed on naturalistic grounds. In that case, we would seem to be entitled to some quite interesting inferences. First, the understanding and aspiring subject, its experiential and (especially) transcendental states and activities, would definitely belong in our ontology, as these would be entities the existence of which, if not already immediately evident, is necessarily presupposed by *the sole viable explanation* of the occurrence, structure, and character of experience. (I take that to be a critical point in the context of Fichtean theory-construction. In what follows, I use the expression

»acts of positing, etc.« to adumbrate the entire set of entities in question here.)

It is important that we not confuse (i.) the simple affirmation that acts of positing, etc., actually exist – a relatively modest metaphysical claim plainly implied by the overall argument of the *Wissenschaftslehre* – with (ii.) some manner of theoretical identification or correlation of acts of positing, etc., with anything ultimately non-conscious and arational in nature – a much more ambitious metaphysical move, and one that runs counter to the essential upshot of Fichte's arguments. Simply to countenance acts of positing, etc., ontologically is not necessarily to reify them by re-conceptualizing them as, or otherwise affiliating them with, entities essentially alien to properly subjective and/or rational states and activities. Instead, it is simply to affirm that acts of positing, etc., are not nothing: that a world containing *only* acts of positing, etc., would still be vastly different from a world containing nothing at all. Ergo, supposing that we grant the success of Fichte's epistemological-explanatory endeavor, along with the failure of the naturalistic school to field any tenable competitors, we ought to understand the *Wissenschaftslehre* to epistemically underwrite at least one non-trivial metaphysical commitment – namely, that reality, whatever else might or might not be true of it, contains understanding and aspiring subjects (i.e., finite rational beings) and their states and activities, experiential and (more importantly) transcendental.

Moreover, and more incisively, on the above assumptions it also appears that our ontology really ought not to include any essentially unmental entities, as these are entities additional to and distinct in kind from the states and acts of subjectivity whose existence is necessary and sufficient for experience's comprehensible explanation. (Sufficient, for reasons outlined above; necessary because, on Fichte's account, the *only* viable explanation of experience is the idealist one.) Now, if we have no reason to quantify over any essentially unmental entities, then *a fortiori* we have no reason theoretically to admit the existence of any non-conscious, arational causal determinants of the rational being's activity in understanding and aspiring. Granted, this does not absolutely preclude the possibility that such ›things in themselves‹ actually exist – as, indeed, they appear to. But possibility is not evidence of actuality, and on Fichte's epistemology, neither is our experience of what *appears* as a world made up mostly of non-conscious, arational entities that impersonally and ateleologically influence, even engender, our mental activities. On Fichte's account, experi-

ence's immanent contents neither directly reveal any irreducibly extra-subjective entities nor support any non-circular inference to the existence thereof;²⁶ and experience's only viable explanation proceeds without once invoking any entity of the sort, with the result that our necessary *representations* of non-conscious causal determinants of understanding and aspiring receive a philosophical *explanation* strictly and solely in terms of states and activities of self-articulating finite intelligence and will.

Admitting all this, one might still counsel suspension of judgment on the metaphysical question at issue here, insisting that the Fichtean mode of epistemological-explanatory argumentation does not absolutely rule out the existence of non-conscious causal determinants of acts of positing, etc. The latter point is correct – but any suspension of judgment based solely thereupon would seem to accord to mere conceivability far too much epistemic import. True, in the wake of Fichte's transcendental-epistemological explanation of experience, it remains conceivable that there exist non-conscious causal determinants of acts of positing, etc. But that something conceivably exists is, by itself, no real reason for thinking that it actually or even probably does so. And if, following Fichte, we suppose that the *Wissenschaftslehre's* explanatory argument succeeds and that its naturalistic competitors all fail, then we evidently have *no epistemic reasons*, non-inferential *or* philosophical, for supposing that non-conscious causal determinants of acts of positing, etc., actually exist. In that case, considerations of clarity and simplicity plainly favor an account that affirms the reality of acts of positing, etc., but that eschews any existence-claims concerning non-conscious, arational entities of any kind.

No wonder, then, that according to Fichte, »that things in themselves exist outside us and independently of us« is a »deception« which »is quite avoidable and which can be completely extirpated by true philosophy.«²⁷ Given the completion of the transcendental-epistemological explanation of experience and the untenability of any naturalistic alternatives, the most defensible philosophical stance is that »there is no world that subsists on its own. Wherever we look, we see nothing but the reflection of our own inner activity.«²⁸ Perhaps this also explains why Fichte evidently equates

26 Review of the *Journal for Truth* (1797): GA, I/4: 434f.; IWL: 124f.

27 Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 514; IWL: 98–99.

28 »On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World« (1798): SW, V: 180; IWL 145.

the completion of the transcendental-epistemological explanation of experience with the defeat of determinism, at least as concerns the most elemental activities of thinking and willing. In the wake of the *Wissenschaftslehre's* explanatory argument, the speculation that understanding and aspiring are mechanically engendered by non-conscious, arational entities is, epistemically speaking, wholly discredited, and a quite different account, informed by the *Wissenschaftslehre's* principal postulations and thereby committed to the reality of »an absolute self-activity of the human spirit,«²⁹ is indicated. Thus, Fichte's proclamation: »My system is the first system of freedom. Just as France has freed men from external shackles, so my system frees him from the fetters of things in themselves, which is to say, from those external influences with which all previous systems – including the Kantian – have more or less fettered man.«³⁰ (In a later and more canonical text, it emerges that other Kantians' constant invocations of things in themselves as philosophical supports, however tenuous, for materialistic or deterministic speculations, however tentative, have so exasperated Fichte as to drive him to deny outright that Kant himself ever truly took such things seriously.)³¹

If the above, admittedly rough reconstruction of his reasoning is correct, then, given the success of the transcendental-epistemological project and the untenability of its naturalistic rivals, Fichte could reasonably advocate the adoption of some general and not-uncontroversial metaphysical views: immaterialism concerning that which is justifiably believed to exist, and libertarianism concerning at least the ontic fundamentals of cognition and volition. (»Reasonably advocate their adoption,« I say, not »purport to have proven with certainty.«) Note, too, that in arriving at immaterialism and libertarianism along such lines, Fichte would not in any clear sense be lapsing into any plainly »dogmatic« or »pre-Critical« way of philosophizing. Concerning these concepts, some key lines from Kant: »Criticism [...] is opposed only to dogmatism, i.e., to the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles, which reason has been using for a long time without first inquiring in what way and by what right it has obtained them. Dogmatism is therefore

29 Review of Gebhard (1793): SW, VIII: 420.

30 Draft of a Letter to Baggesen (April or May 1795): EPW: 385.

31 Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): SW, I: 480–86; IWL: 65–71.

the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, without an antecedent critique of its own capacity. [...] [C]riticism is the preparatory activity necessary for the advancement of metaphysics as a well-grounded science.«³²

As I hope that the preceding indicates, one may straightforwardly reconstruct plainly Fichtean arguments that cut against materialism, mind-body dualism, and determinism, and that speak in support of immaterialism and a kind of libertarianism: arguments that are methodologically preceded, epistemically underwritten, and conceptually informed by the findings of Fichte's own critical-epistemological inquiry into reason's own capacity. Such arguments are, at least to that extent, philosophical fruits of criticism, not echoes of the old dogmatism, in Kant's sense of those two terms. And the same is true, I think, of the final Fichtean argument to be explored herein.

3. *The case for cosmological idealism*

I shall refer to the new line of thinking now in question as the *inference to cosmological idealism*. By »cosmological idealism,« I mean the view that what truly and ultimately exists is a plurality of instances of spontaneously self-articulating, elementally aspiring intelligence – that is to say, of *rational beings* (or states or activities thereof), as the essence and the elements of rational being are figured in Fichtean philosophy. Cosmological idealism may thus be contrasted with what, following Jacobi, we might call »speculative egoism,«³³ the view according to which there exists a *single* spontaneously self-positing, world-imaging subject and absolutely nothing else besides. (If by »metaphysical idealism« we understand simply the view that whatever ultimately exists is in some sense mental, then both cosmological idealism and speculative egoism are instances of metaphysical idealism. It is partly for this reason, though principally for etymological ones, that I prefer »cosmological idealism« as the tag for what I take to be Fichte's position.)

32 Bxxxv-Bxxxvi.

33 Jacobi, *Werke*, II: 310; MPW, 338.

Absent the inference to cosmological idealism, the argumentative essentials of the *Wissenschaftslehre* would seem not merely consistent with but even conducive to the embrace of a quite radical sort of solipsism. Note that in introducing the inference in this way, I intend only to identify its systematic role: that of epistemically underwriting a belief in the reality of entities other than the transcendental subject – entities which the transcendental explanation of experience, strictly speaking, has no need to invoke. I do not mean to imply that this inference is an *ad hoc* expedient or extra-theoretical add-on whereby Fichte tries to avoid being pushed by his own principles into solipsism's unwelcome embrace. Unfortunately, such an impression can be conveyed by *The Vocation of Man*, the one work in which the transcendental explanation of experience and the inference to cosmological idealism are most plainly and suggestively demarcated from one another. If its highly dramatized, popular presentation is taken at more or less face value (and thus *not* as clarified and qualified by Fichte's technical writings), *The Vocation of Man* may seem to suggest that Fichte's only defense against solipsism is an ethical exhortation to cling to certain cherished notions despite their indisputable demolition via supremely rigorous reasoning. Were this indeed Fichte's position, it would mark a disappointing end to the Jena period – at least for those of us who insist that there be properly *epistemic* warrants for the acceptance of any non-trivial philosophical proposition. Happily, however, there are solid systematic reasons for thinking that Fichte can argue against solipsism on epistemically respectable grounds. (And note that to argue against solipsism is to argue *for* a certain metaphysical thesis.)

The crux of the matter is this: the reason that the transcendental explanation of experience underwrites the ontological elimination of non-conscious, arational entities (entities of a sort that might mechanically condition all understanding and aspiration), is that, strictly speaking, said explanation obviates *any* philosophical commitment to *any* entities transcendent to subjectivity. As Fichte puts the point, in the light of the transcendental explanation of experience, »[t]he consciousness of a thing outside of us is absolutely nothing more than the product of our own representative capacity [...] . [I]n all our consciousness we simply know of nothing

other than ourselves and our own determinations.«³⁴ Accordingly, in all experience, strictly speaking, »you remain entirely within the sphere of your own consciousness and never escape from it, and your entire ›system of the world‹ is nothing more whatsoever than the system of your necessary thinking.«³⁵

Such statements can make it seem that the *Wissenschaftslehre* secures spirit and spontaneity against the mechanism of the empirically evident world only by epistemologically annihilating all grounds for belief in the subject's real connectedness to anything beyond itself. Hence Jacobi's influential depiction of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as, ultimately, »nihilism,«³⁶ whereby, in defense of an utterly empty form of freedom, all objects of experience are reduced to »phantoms-in-themselves, appearances of nothing,«³⁷ such that the rational being's active, intelligent self-elaboration actually proceeds »from nothing, to nothing, for nothing, into nothing.«³⁸ I take such statements to show that Jacobi understood rather well what Fichte set out to establish and how he set out to establish it. Rather well, but importantly incompletely, for in addition to the narrowly epistemological argumentation which, *taken on its own*, ought indeed to undermine any belief in the existence of anything beyond or beneath the transcendental subject, the *Wissenschaftslehre* also incorporates a distinct, properly theoretical inference to the reality – not to say mechanistic materiality – of other beings in whose midst the finite rational being exists.

The *Wissenschaftslehre's* transcendental explanation of experience, strictly so called, strikes conceptual bedrock with the philosophical postulation of transcendental states and acts of the finite rational being that are, on Fichte's view, necessary and sufficient to account for experience's immanent qualitative contents and immanent organizing forms. Along the way, however, said explanation also establishes, concerning the transcendental subject, that said subject is a primordially *practical* being. To be more precise, Fichte takes it that the transcendental explanation of experience

34 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 239; VM: 59. Here and hereafter, »VM« refers to: Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, tr. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett: 1987).

35 Review of the *Journal for Truth* (1797): GA, I/4: 434; IWL: 124.

36 Jacobi, *Werke*, III: 44; MPW: 519.

37 Jacobi, *Werke*, III: 33; MPW: 514.

38 Jacobi, *Werke*, III: 22; MPW: 508. Cf. Fichte, *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 248; VM: 67.

establishes that all representation of and judgment about putatively mind-independent objects presupposes a special sort of *aspiration* (typically termed »striving«) on the part of the finite rational being: namely, the impetus, ineluctably inherent in reason *per se*, to unfold itself and extend its comprehension by subsuming all initially-obscure givens (most rudimentary among them, the finite rational being's recalcitrant sensory and affective states) under reason's own self-generated, systematically interrelated, sense-making and order-inducing forms. To express that recondite transcendental point in the simplified, psychologized language of *The Vocation of Man*, for the Fichtean, »All our thinking is founded in our drives.«³⁹

»The need to act is first, not consciousness of the world, which is derived.«⁴⁰ That is to say, the transcendental subject comes to represent a world to itself only on the basis of its elemental aspiration, *qua* rational being, optimally to organize that with which it is mentally presented: an aspiration applied, in the first place, to the »immediate feelings« that first furnish reason with raw material upon which to work, and an aspiration more fully (albeit never wholly) satisfied via still more complex forms of comprehension and ethically upright ways of willing. As I see it, it is strictly for the sake of making appropriately sophisticated sense of this proposition that Fichte couples to his transcendental-idealist account of experience, a metaphysical-realist commitment to the reality of extra-subjective entities – but only entities of just such a sort as to complement, not contravene, his transcendental epistemology and the immaterialist, libertarian metaphysical stance non-dogmatically grounded thereupon.

Fichte's idea, I suggest, is that the primarily practical way of being predicated of the transcendental subject by the transcendental explanation of experience is optimally intelligible only on the assumption that the transcendental subject is in *some* way environed by and engaged with entities distinct from and additional to its own sensory and affective states. The transcendental explanation of experience figures the transcendental subject in such a way as to confront the Fichtean with the question: What sort of broader or deeper sense can we make of the fact that reality contains ineluctably aspiring transcendental subjects? Whence or whither a being

39 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 256; VM: 73.

40 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 263; VM: 79.

whose being is defined by this striving? At least on the face of it, it is unclear how one could intelligibly answer that question without in some way envisioning states of affairs somehow involving entities other than the transcendental subject itself.⁴¹ As Fichte expresses this idea, using the phrase »moral order« to denote the other entities in question – and »in order to distinguish this order from the order of nature,«⁴² »[T]he person who posits this moral order undoubtedly does not posit it within the finite moral being, but posits it outside the latter. Accordingly, he undoubtedly assumes something else in addition to and outside of the finite being.«⁴³

Further, because it is the primordially practical nature of the transcendental subject, as unveiled precisely by the transcendental explanation of experience, that warrants the postulation of some sort of order environing that subject, the postulated constituents of this order must suffice to make that subject's ineluctably aspiring way of being optimally intelligible, and in a manner that neither conceptually clashes with, nor is epistemically undermined by, the transcendental explanation in question. (This, I take it, is the deep philosophical upshot of Fichte's popularized pronouncement: »My world is the object and sphere of my duties and nothing else. Another world, or other properties of my world, do not exist for me.«)⁴⁴ Accordingly, that environment should not be understood as one made up of non-conscious, arational entities of the sort that might mechanically condition understanding and aspiration: all reasons for belief in the actual (not merely apparent) existence of entities of *that specific sort* are demolished by the *Wissenschaftslehre's* epistemological argumentation. Thus, in order best to reflect what Fichte's epistemological argumentation *does* equip one to affirm, the postulated environment should be understood to be an order populated and produced by autonomously understanding and aspiring, non-mechanically interacting subjects – as »an entire invisible realm

41 Granted, the question at issue here may be a complex one in the bad sense, and the assertion just made is anything but incontestable. My aim here, however, is simply to reconstruct Fichte's reasoning, not to evaluate each key step.

42 »From a Private Letter« (1800): SW, V: 392; IWL: 171–72

43 »From a Private Letter« (1800): SW, V: 392; IWL: 171–72.

44 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 261; VM: 77.

of spirits,«⁴⁵ or »a system of a number of individual wills,«⁴⁶ interacting »as reason upon reason, as spirit upon spirit«⁴⁷; a »world of reason«⁴⁸ or »realm of freedom and rational self-activity.«⁴⁹

In light of the transcendental explanation of experience and this, its metaphysical supplementation via an abductive inference to cosmological idealism, »the whole sensible world is transformed« for the student of the *Wissenschaftslehre* »purely into nothingness, into a mere reflection in mortal eyes of the nonsensible, which alone exists.«⁵⁰ Philosophically speaking, »The dead, inert mass, which was only the stuffing of space, has disappeared [...] .«⁵¹ Note that the transcendental explanation of experience remains wholly in place: the objects of experience are still construed as mere appearances, ideated posits of the finite rational being's active, autonomous striving and sense-making. But in light of the inference to cosmological idealism, these appearances are not, *contra* Jacobi, appearances ›of nothing.‹ They are, instead, oblique indications of the finite rational being's situatedness within a spiritual order that transcends it, and by which it is called upon to unfold its manifold rational – and thus, following Kant, moral – potentials: »The world is nothing more than our own inner acting (*qua* pure intellect), made visible to the senses in accordance with comprehensible laws of reason and limited by incomprehensible boundaries within which we simply find ourselves to be confined [i.e., particular qualitative and affective givens]. This is what is asserted by transcendental theory, and no one should be blamed for being made uneasy by the complete disappearance of the ground beneath one's feet. Granted, the origin of these boundaries is incomprehensible; but, replies practical philosophy [...] [n]othing is clearer or more certain than the *meaning* of these boundaries: They constitute your determinate place in the moral order of things.«⁵²

45 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 282; VM: 94.

46 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 299; VM: 108.

47 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 297; VM: 106.

48 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 282; VM: 94.

49 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 283; VM: 95.

50 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 308; VM: 115.

51 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 315; VM: 120.

52 »On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World« (1798): SW, V: 184–85; IWL: 149–50.

Thus, ultimately, »Only reason is; infinite reason in itself, and finite reason in it and through it. Only in our minds does it create a world, or at least that *from* which and *through* which we produce it: the call to duty; and concordant feelings, intuitions, and laws of thought.«⁵³

Note that the inference outlined above is premised upon the *fact* of the transcendental subject's ineluctably aspiring way of being, as the latter is demonstrated – most strictly, Fichte thinks – by the transcendental *explanation* of experience. That is to say, the argument is not, despite what certain of its popular presentations might suggest, ultimately founded on the simple hope or unargued conviction that the philosopher's pre-critical self-conception is, in essence, accurate. (Several important passages in *The Vocation of Man* do have that flavor about them, but I suggest that those passages present in popularized terms the more rarefied reflections reconstructed above.) An argument to cosmological idealism premised simply on certain unquestioned aspirations would be conceptually quite different and logically much weaker than the argument at issue here. As Fichte himself states, belief in a supersensible, rational-ethical realm of being »should not be represented as, so to speak, an arbitrary assumption one may adopt or not adopt as one pleases, that is, as a free decision to consider true whatever the heart wishes and to do so because this is what it wishes. Nor should this belief be represented as a hope that supplements or takes the place of sufficient (or insufficient?) grounds of conviction.«⁵⁴

Why, then, does Fichte sometimes figure that belief as a matter of »faith« (*Glaube*)? I think that this principally reflects his wish to underscore some basic affinities between his own position and Jacobi's on the metaphysical question whether there exists an objective reality in which spirit, reason and freedom reign supreme. (At any rate, on a careful reading it is quite clear that at no point in his response to Jacobi does Fichte retreat from the transcendental-epistemological starting-point and strategy that is the main occasion for Jacobi's critique.) Another reason for which talk of »faith« here is fitting is this: while the postulation of a supersensible rational-ethical order is conceptually coherent with and doctrinally complementary to Fichte's transcendental explanation of experience, it is not out-

53 *The Vocation of Man* (1800): SW, II: 303; VM: 111.

54 »On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World« (1798): SW, V: 179; IWL: 144.

right necessary to that particular project, nor is it strictly entailed by any of the claims comprised by the completed version thereof. (An ineluctably aspiring but ontologically isolated transcendental subject is at least conceivable, even if not optimally intelligible in the sense intended above.) As a result, the postulation of a supersensible realm of reason cannot claim the exemplary epistemic standing enjoyed by claims that are absolutely necessary to the solution of philosophy's fundamental problem: the explanation of experience. And where the knowledge-faith distinction is in effect, the honorific »knowledge« is typically reserved for only those claims that meet the strictest standards of evidence or demonstration. Still, it does not follow that matters of so-called »faith« or »belief« must therefore be claims for which there are no compelling cognitive grounds. For the Fichtean, I take it, while claims about a supersensible rational-ethical order of being are not strictly warranted as indispensable ingredients of the correct explanation of experience, such metaphysical commitments are, nonetheless, justifiably adopted as conceptually complementary, clarifying corollaries of the explanation in question.

4 Concluding remarks

For purposes of properly understanding the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, we should, I suggest, reflect especially energetically on the content and the ramifications of those relatively few Jena-era writings in which Fichte plainly presents a clearly delineated conception of the fundamental task of philosophical inquiry, plus an argument that there exists only one viable approach to that essentially explanatory undertaking. That approach, of course, is idealism: an approach which eschews any reference to any non-conscious or arational entities (as we know from Fichte's own hand), one which inescapably involves certain non-trivial metaphysical commitments (as I have explained in section 1), and one which, successfully implemented, epistemically underwrites several much more ambitious metaphysical inferences (as I have indicated in sections 2 and 3). In the light of such considerations, it seems to me that one can justifiably ascribe to the early *Wissenschaftslehre* quite some unabashedly metaphysical ambition and import.

Granted, that claim invites any number of reasonable questions that have not been addressed herein. Still, I hope that this essay makes some

progress toward making it clear that there certainly could exist a carefully crafted systematic position that simultaneously (i.) satisfies broadly Kantian criteria for properly ›critical‹ theory-construction, and (ii.) comes to theoretically-grounded conclusions that situate it squarely within the tradition of rigorous and all-encompassing metaphysical system-building. More particularly, I hope to have given some good reasons for thinking that in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* we confront a searching and sustained attempt securely to ground and artfully to elaborate a position of exactly that sort.

Presuppositions of Knowledge versus Immediate Certainty of Being: Fichte's 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* as a Critique of Knowledge and a Program of Philosophical Foundation

Ulrich Schlösser

One of the most influential motifs in the development of German Idealism's philosophy is the thesis that our understanding of the world and self is to presuppose a ground which either remains a mere thought for us, or reveals itself only in a postulated direct, conceptless intuition, yet not in a way sufficing for the claim to knowledge. In the course of its intellectual development this dual claim – of the necessity, at least from our perspective, of a presupposition and disclaiming knowledge of what is presupposed – was advanced in connection with different theoretical contexts and using mutually independent arguments. In both an early review and in a later reprise Fichte himself diagnoses Kant as already having made this claim. However, discussion intensified only in a second phase, when the thesis was once again emphatically asserted in reaction to Fichte's own attempt to ground philosophy on the self-consciousness of a free subject taken in itself. From 1801 onwards, in a turnabout much noted to this day, Fichte himself took up the thesis in his approach, and in 1804, in his second Berlin lecture on the *Wissenschaftslehre*, made it the central focus of his deliberations. How is his stance now to be understood? Obviously not such that he just took on the thesis that our thinking and action has an elusive precondition. Rather, he seems to have wanted to subject the thesis and context of discussion in which it stood, including obvious alternatives, to epistemological critique, in order then to repel them. In doing this Fichte does not intend to deny the assumption of the subject's boundness,

but to understand it more appropriately. Moreover, he sees no possibility for consistently representing in knowledge the claim that the subject is bound to an outset which is absolutely and in every respect elusive. But the truth of his outset is also not to be expected only in the inwardness of a feeling accompanying us in orientation. And finally, Fichte does not wish to allow such a presupposed basis to be entirely absorbed in a form of totalized conceptual mediation in the manner we are today familiar with from Hegel. It is manifest that Fichte can only be successful in this strategy if he succeeds in establishing a new conception of knowledge which can also partially get around epistemological reservations and which does not reduce the sense of knowledge to the conceptual side and its contents by bypassing its attitudinal and experiential character.

In accordance with these thoughts, the first part of this paper is a reminder of the arguments advanced in support of the elusive presupposition theorem towards the end of the 18th century. Following this, I attempt to sketch the structure of the 1804(2) *Wissenschaftslehre*, which encompasses the ascendant line of thought, relating critically to the presupposition theorem, along with the supreme principles, there explicated with the help of the terms ›being‹ and ›life‹. Against this background, the third step analyzes Fichte's peculiar conception of evident insight, which Fichte himself discusses in substantivized form using the concept of ›light‹. It is to this that the claim to an alternative understanding of knowledge is to be attached.

1. Arguments in the run-up to the later Wissenschaftslehre

Already in his 1793 Creuzer review Fichte himself interprets the architecture of Kantian philosophy in a way approaching the theorem that our relation to the world has elusive presuppositions. This interpretation thus already finds itself in thematic proximity to the then more abstractly construed link to Kant with which Fichte opens the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1804. Looking at the older account, the differentiation between a knowing and an active relation to the world is foregrounded, with the first subjecting its object to the principles of sufficient reason and of cause and effect – and this applies not only to outer experience, but also to inner experience, including that of being determined in self-activity. Conversely, the second form of relation to the world is related precisely to the sense of freedom in

self-determination. Both the tension between the two spheres of our relation to the world and a separation of the two in reaction to this here bring the danger of sceptical consequences that ultimately also affect the unity of our self. According to Fichte, this leads Kant to presuppose, as distinct from the more specific concept of cause, a ground that is to coordinate the two spheres' relationship to one another, and hence also to stabilize each in itself. Considering Kant's restrictive definition of what it means to know something, the fact that knowing in the narrow sense of the scientific is itself one of the sides to be regulated, and, in addition, that the other side is freedom which in itself already cannot be intelligibly grasped, it is natural to assume that this ground presupposed in our relations to the world likewise cannot be known. By speaking of it as 'higher support'¹ Fichte sees it as already having been identified by Kant as an ultimate authority.

By contrast, F. H. Jacobi presents a different argument. It belongs to the second phase mentioned above and so already addresses itself to the early Fichte's position. Correspondingly, it already takes the unity of the subject and its relational feats, which are to be grounded in the thinker's self-consciousness, as its point of departure. On these conditions Jacobi argues that when the I is made the point of departure, and consequently must be understood as the sole origin of the possibility of knowledge, it directly follows that its objects are also not to be apprehended as finished and given to it. Rather, they are to be considered on the condition of their constructibility by the subject. This brings the danger that 'in everything and out of everything the human mind seeks out only itself',² and that its knowledge and its actions lose their meaning since they lack a higher 'for-the-sake-of-which', one independent of our activity, that first provides both with their value. To avoid this, the human mind must, as a counter-move, be conceived of as the faculty for presupposing something Final or True, which, to the extent that the form of knowledge remains bound to the subject's feats, cannot in turn itself be known. As a consequence we would still be referred to an unobtainable presupposition even if the unity of the subject does not first need to be established.

If one also attempts to draw on Schelling's ambiguous position on this matter in the latter half of the 1790s, it must be said that he, unlike the oth-

1 [höheren Beystand'] J.G.Fichte, Gesamtausgabe (GA) 1,2, Stuttgart 1962 ff., p.12.

2 F.H.Jacobi, Werke, Leipzig 1816 – 1825, vol.3, p.16.

er authors, does not first gain the assumption of an unintelligible and ultimate authority as a consequence of criticism. Rather, he would rely directly on the idea of an Unconditioned, which, as such, permits neither an outer perspective or a determination that restricts it, nor an internal division into either consciousness and object or self-consciousness and object. Thus, by hypothesis, the Unconditioned would be thought of as a ground of everything conditioned in knowledge, action, and their objects – a ground which itself could never be objectified and, at least in conceptual knowledge, could never be obtained, but which must be presupposed in comprehension.

Finally, it can be supposed that Fichte himself will also have come close to the theorem of unobtainable presupposition when, impressed by Jacobi's and Schelling's critique, he inquires about the origin of knowledge in self-consciousness.

2. *The ascendant line of thought and its peripeteia*

a. Looking at Fichte's 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* against this background, it is conspicuous that Fichte is less interested in the material content of the arguments – including those of Kant's position, which he discusses in detail at the beginning. For the material content remains bound to what Fichte sees as the authors' ultimately contingent initial assumptions. Rather, it is the logical form underlying the arguments that is in the foreground. It is this logical form that Fichte not only deals with, but also translates into a strategy for setting out the *Wissenschaftslehre* so as, on the basis of this translation, to develop his critique of it. This can be clarified using two aspects.

Thus (1) the theorem of elusive presuppositions is marked by something like ›reflection‹ – to the extent that in asserting a proposition about the limits of our knowledge we are laying claim to knowledge which has the faculty of knowledge itself as its object. Put another way: Whoever indulges in such a theorem is no longer operating only in the realm of a material theory, but is already at a metatheoretical, or metaphilosophical, level. And Fichte is further of the view that such a program, one vaunted as self-enlightenment, must also be in a position to account both for its implications and for the status of the claim directed to the consideration of limits itself. The result of this is a dual reflective movement which can

be shown to enter directly into the architecture of Fichte's critical argument as an essential, basic methodical trait.

A second feature (2), one closely intertwined with the first, is the argumentative form of presupposing. Here one proceeds from a certain state of affairs – in Fichte's case, the carrying out, initiated by him, of an intellectual assumption or conception – and then asks about the sole conditions in which it is possible. This explains why, in the decisive sections of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, we constantly come across analysis of conditional statements the antecedent of which is a statement of belief – that is, something which, as a premiss, can initially be understood only as contingent, but which is to have as its consequent something absolutely necessary or (to use the epistemic correlate) certain. The decisive feature with such conditional statements is that no unconditioned form of certainty is present. This is always the case when Fichte avails himself of sentences of the form ›If...is to be grasped or assumed, then it holds that...‹.³

If we now look briefly in the realm of criticism, it is in particular the procedure of semantic ascent located in the first trait, which considers the postulated theorem itself as a thesis, that provides space for the possibility of playing off the conditions of utterance and the form of representation against the intended content. Thus Fichte takes his initial orientation from the assumption that the knowledge to be rejected is conceptually/propositionally constituted and then urges that if the idea of the incomprehensible is to be taken strictly, the question arises as to how we might have arrived at insight into the necessity of retracting comprehension at all. Figuratively speaking: Comprehension does not first obtain access to its other, which then breaks down; it is outside from the start. And this not only means that we do not know what causes us to fail. Though it is certain that this is the case. To the extent that with everything we comprehend our success in understanding is constantly presupposed, comprehension might seem to us from the inside to be limitless. Should this not be the case, then a different mode of knowing must already be being enlisted precisely in

3 Fichte's German – ›Soll ... erfaßt bzw. angenommen werden, so gilt ...‹ – is here ambivalent and alludes to the normative mode of speech ›it should be that ..., hence it holds ...‹. On this subject cf. in the first ascendant movement lecture VI, 90; in the second, for example, XVI, 250 and XXII, 336. Page numbers here and in the following refer to volume II,8 of the Bavarian Academy of Science's complete works of Fichte (GA).

the rejection of our grasp. This consideration is still in the background when in the fourth lecture Fichte moves on from the formulation ›comprehension of the thoroughly incomprehensible‹ [*Begreifen des durchaus Unbegreiflichen*] (54), which in itself cannot be stabilized, to the thesis of the suspension of comprehension through evidence (e.g. 56).

Fichte then hones the thesis further to the extent that even where we negate the possibility of knowledge we make use of the form of judgement and hence claim a form of access. The latter applies not because denial is a form of attribution, but because the judgement could not otherwise be a judgement about that which it claims to be. In the judgement we make reference to its object, assumed to be reified, and then proceed to what is stated. And this applies in a first step to what is presupposed itself, but then also to the intuitive sense of knowledge mentioned, because this can fulfil its function only on the condition that it corresponds to what has been presupposed.⁴

In statements of the form cited in (2), however, what is presupposed shifts to the position of a mere consequent and so enters the realm of consideration only in respect of its connection with an antecedent, or a premiss, with the premiss's contingency having already become transparent. Finally, in this form of argument it is only mentioned at all as a means to the end of the possibility of understanding something else, and not as something which is in itself determined and significant alone. If this is the case, it follows at least, according to Fichte, that the mode of representation chosen systematically misrepresents the claim to have an ultimate and hence absolute fundament in what is presupposed.

It is these tensions between the representational strategy and criticism that drive the developmental logic of the ascendant arguments in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*. If one considers their overall trajectory, it must however be noted that Fichte does not direct his criticism only against the presupposition theorem. Thus, for example, he also calls into doubt the assumption that knowing one's self or one's own thinking is the final authority sought, and also runs through his criticisms in relation to the transition theme linked with the assumption of a fundament.

4 On this, in the context of the fourth lecture, cf. p. 62.

b. Fichte makes the transition from the critical account to his own point of departure when dealing with a state he designates using the terms ›being‹ and ›life‹.⁵ This state is to be (1) a reality that rests in itself in the sense that it is mediated by neither external nor internal differentiations. Secondly, according to Fichte it should hold that (2) this state is not something lying beyond the reflecting subject and which, with reasons, can be merely assumed or not assumed by the latter. Rather, the subject, as that which it immediately is, is to participate in this reality. And this participation is (3) to establish itself precisely where the discourse directed to the unconditional – which centres on questions about its conceivability, its presuppositional character etc. – deconstructs itself.

This step suggests at least two questions: Can the transition carried out by Fichte be interpreted in a way that does not fall back on the forms previously criticized? How can it be, with participation in the state concerned, that one does not simply depart from what can meaningfully be called ›philosophy‹? That is, how is it possible that in its aspects of immediacy and reality this state is simultaneously actualized as a way of knowing which ultimately also affords limited rights to the kind of objectifying and conceptually mediated discourse that I am now practising?

To give some idea of a possible answer to the first question, I am going to emphasize two considerations – not Fichte's own, but in keeping with his approach:

Here it should be considered, first, that Fichte interprets the differentiations determining the critical train of thought constructively in the sense that he assumes the specifications we undertake in comprehension are not completely determined by its object. Rather, we ourselves have made the specifications in comprehending. Further, Fichte starts by assuming that in the sequence of expounded positions laying down these specifications each position has been reduced to that which respectively follows. And he assumes that these positions were not only epistemological, but as such self-referential, insofar as their own reference and their own argumentative form respectively become their subject. If a contradiction occurs, then what follows is not the insight that something is false, but rather the deconstruction of the case of comprehending just carried out, and with this also those preceding it. From the deconstruction of the positions results

5 15th lecture, pp. 228ff.

an abolition of the differences in the respect determined by the train of thought. The rejection of differences is, however, for Fichte inseparably linked with the term ›being‹.

In performing these ways of knowing the subject, secondly, grasps not only its own form of knowledge, but also itself as that agent at work in this form of knowledge. However, if the respective thinking subject is now decisively involved in the positions criticized, a dual possibility results for Fichte. First, the subject, understood according to the pattern of the form of reflection ›I think that...‹, is indeed the source of feats of distancing and determination in positive and negative judgements. If this form of self-reference is also to be retracted with the position, then this works towards guaranteeing entry into that undifferentiated state.

Second, it holds that if we ourselves are involved in the process, and if however self-descriptions current in epistemic practice are deconstructed, then there is the prospect that by this route we ourselves might enter the mode that Fichte wants to attain: the state of immediacy. This is determined by the idea that in this state we are not only immediate to something, but that we are this precisely when we stand immediately to ourselves.

Both considerations only tell us something about really having stepped into the state of being and life. But we do not yet discover anything about a specific way of knowing linked with participation in this state, which has to occur if the state, though participation in it is real, is not to be absolutely concealed and hence once again ultimately bound to being presupposed after all. This makes it necessary to bring in the third basic term of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, the light, the nature of which must be motivated and which must be translated into a familiar trait of our mind.

3. Fichte's conception of certainty

(i) Thus one must first recall that, also according to Fichte, being and life do not amount merely to what can be said about them in a judgement. In the background here is the critique, which in 1804 was already common and shared by Fichte, of the reifying and differentiating effect attributed to the form of judgement in case of its unreflected use. He also continues to assume, as the critique has shown, that the move reacting to this – of presupposing in our knowledge bound to judgements something which eludes this knowledge – cannot straightforwardly be rendered consistent

with regard to the relationship between what we lay claim to in this thesis and that which is its object. There is again clear evidence for this in the second ascendant argument, with Fichte's Jacobi critique in the 18th lecture. Both assumptions together oblige Fichte to recur to a sense of knowing against which the deficits of propositional knowing cannot be asserted. Moreover, he must additionally assume that knowing in this sense is not only discussed, but occurs *in actu*, and that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is not to be identified with a mere text, but with the realization of this sense of knowing in every individual and with what is disclosed in this sense of knowing.

(ii) It must be born in mind that Fichte, in his function as teacher of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, remains bound to a discursive conceptual sense of knowing, since this alone makes communication possible by being integrated in a public linguistic system of rules. The relationship between the nonpropositional sense of knowing and comprehending may then no longer be thought of as replacement or exclusion. The sense of knowing must legitimize comprehending, even though it distorts the object, in its relative validity.

(iii) If one assumes that the form of knowledge sought has two sources, then attention must be paid to Fichte's scepticism, schooled by the critique of Kantian dualisms, towards merely found disjunctions. The discussion over a common ›root‹ to Kant's intuition and understanding is here in the background. This root may not, however, be thought of as something lying beyond the two sources of knowledge. For if knowing is exhausted by these sources, then its origin and their occurrence would remain unintelligible and we would not after all get beyond a fundamental disjunction in philosophy. Rather, one of the two sources must itself be identified with the performance of the original differentiation, so that it releases the possibility of a different manner of knowing reference and transposes itself from an original position into being one member of a relation. This role can only be taken on by the entirely different form of knowing highlighted under (i). If this is now prioritized, then it follows (a) that in this position, just as the state of being and life itself, it cannot be adequately grasped in the conditions of the conceptual. Then, however, knowledge of this sense of knowing must, to the extent that it is original, likewise be constituted in a different way. Hence it is self-referential. This implies (b) that the indic-

ated possibility of limited validity of judgmental reference must be made intelligible in terms of the other sense of knowing.

If one looks at this relationship more closely, considering the altogether ambivalent position of the conceptual, the result is a picture filled with tension of the structure of both sources of knowledge: The original sense of knowing is to be the ground of possibility for conceptually mediated judging. In the latter, however, the former also comes to be represented, albeit subordinately. Yet this representation already presupposes differentiation, so that the original sense of performance is not a direct object of reference. Thus, on the one hand, insofar as it makes possible the conceptual feat which erases it, the performance of original knowing stands in a self-relation of self-retraction. Conversely, this means that the conceptual side is already at work, and hence has validity, in the act of original knowing which it represents. Due to its form, however, the act of original knowing is at the same time deleted and, as a consequence of this, the representation's truth content is also denied. Finally, despite the ambivalences of the conceptual, this tension-filled structure can be stabilized as a conception of knowledge, because the original performative sense itself is knowing and allows what is intuited to be pursued beyond the refraction of the form of representation just mentioned.

(iv) The point of departure for the further phase of thought is then the question as to what in the epistemic realm corresponds to the unconditionedness assigned to the state of being and life. It cannot be the inwardness of a felt experience. It is true that this does not confront the knower with an object to be determined. But this is precisely why it also counts as only subjective and cannot be integrated in an architecture of knowing. Nor can it be experience of the validity of something that could not exist. Rather, following Fichte's linguistic usage, something must become absolutely evident or clear to us;⁶ for where something becomes evident, we inquire no further. Fichte also claims to generate such becoming evident in expounding the *Wissenschaftslehre*. But how does Fichte understand this evidence, so that it can fulfil the function mentioned?

6 The expression ›uns einleuchten‹ literally suggests our being illuminated, lit up, by that which is evident. [Trans.]

To understand the first aspect, one must be clearly aware that with the heading ›certainty‹ we are not inquiring about the presence of a thought in the mind as a result of a previously undertaken, voluntary, constructive activity. Rather, the concern is with what *inspires* in us a thought as an insight that is *compelling for us*. If we now further consider that the area of interest to us here is that of foundational certainties, and that consequently we cannot arrive at something as an insight binding us due to the independently given certainty of other thoughts and a conclusive transition, then – despite an admittedly somewhat forced idiom – what Fichte has been laying claim to from the start follows: the ›self-generation of insight‹ (1st Lecture, p. 4)

A further aspect, alongside spontaneity, which is peculiar to Fichte's conception of certainty is the assumption that certainty stands in a relation to itself, namely in its experiential character. This is the thesis that in a case of certainty not only must something be directly evident, but so too must the certainty itself. For it is not sufficient that we are able to distinguish states of certainty from those of opinion. It must also be indisputable that we are dealing with certainty. For only when no doubt is possible with regard to the character of certainty can it claim validity for the basic state of affairs. Both aspects of the sense of knowing are therefore shaped by the corresponding possibility of doubt: one is directed to the content, that currently of interest to the attitude. They can be distinguished, but the first is not possible without the second.

(v) Both considerations move towards a thesis that Fichte articulates time and time again: certainty ›is in itself I‹. (350) Despite the terse formulation, and counter to the standing generally accorded to the theme of self-consciousness in Fichte's work, this thesis is not to be read as identifying certainty with self-consciousness. This thesis is more of an abbreviated point emphasizing traits that befit certainty as that which it itself is – and this by considering the fact that certainty and self-consciousness are quite different. What is specific to certainty can be highlighted on the basis of the distinction between two modes of spontaneous activity, both of which enter into the complete course of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. On the one hand, I perform through myself the voluntary activity of construction, either of the thought of my self or of further thoughts following on from this. On the other hand, given merely necessary preparations on the part of intellectual activity, an insight occurs, as a result of its own constitution, as unavailable

to me. In occurring independently of my will certainty is hence more like the state of being and life than self-consciousness. Just as that state, it too is not subject to our activities of necessary presupposition or of mere postulation; rather it is real in the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself – as that fundamental evidence which the *Wissenschaftslehre* claims to be effecting. What is specific with regard to certainty is here that it may well be in me, and also to be understood as a way of knowing, but it is not effected by me and so eludes my voluntary action. Unlike the self-consciousness that determines itself, which I respectively am, and what results from it, certainty hence meets Jacobi's requirement of unavailability.⁷ But it does this – and in this Fichte remains true to himself – not by assuming something opposed to us and eluding knowledge, or by mislocating access to it solely in feeling. Rather, it must be said that knowing, as something that is to function as the foundation of our philosophical disclosure of the world, is first stabilized altogether by this feature.

(vi) The preceding deliberations have only informed us about the features peculiar to Fichte's conception of original certainty. But we also wanted information as to how Fichte intends to make use of the designated conception in the framework previously explicated, which means finding out how certainty can take on a cognitive function with respect to the state of being and life. Here it is not possible that the state of being and life effects an experience of evidence that conveys, and so renders experienceable, the unconditionedness of that state in its categorical character. For then the occurrence of certainty, as that in which the trait of unconditionedness is conveyed, and hence the difference between this and the state of being and life would remain unobtainable within the experience of certainty. This leads Fichte to the radical accentuation of his conception of certainty with which we first reach his own stance: He goes so far as to identify the state of being and life with certainty itself. Only now do we understand the peculiar idiom that Fichte makes use of throughout: He speaks not of a state of affair's becoming evident, but in the substantivized form of ›the light‹. Hence, in the 23rd lecture, the goal of our deliberations, he wants to grasp ›not certainty of anything whatever‹, but certainty ›pure and in itself‹. (344)

7 On this cf. Jacobi's epistle to Fichte in: Jacobi, Werke, Leipzig 1812–25, vol. 3.

This step of detaching certainty is not, however, to be understood such that all relation to some content were lost, for Fichte's conception would then collapse as a conception of certainty. Rather, if we consider the inner structure of certainty, it becomes apparent that Fichte is striving to reverse the direction in which we look at the relationship between the experience of certainty and content. Fichte wants to move not from a thought to the evidence that grasps us, but from self-bearing evidence to a thought.

If the state of being and life is now to come to be represented and being certain assimilated to this, while it is the latter which generates the thought, then the thought's content represents, *post factum* and under its conditions, not only being and life, but also the way to the thought itself. Yet it does this in such a manner that the thought content acquires legitimacy only through the viewpoint of the performance of original knowing and that the limits lying in the form of comprehending simultaneously remain transparent. In this elementary act we gain the thought of validity as an unsurpassable fundament. In a further step this can then be enlisted in the foundation of our various relational feats. More precisely considered, Fichte here proceeds by analyzing, in various possible perspectives, the aspect of boundness just indicated together with that of free activity itself. These analyses now proceed from a starting point that neither makes unreflective use of the theorem of elusive presuppositions, nor relies on mere presentience – and yet which allows him to hold on to a consideration of the limits of knowing, understood as merely conceptual knowing.

Translation by Andrew Inkpin.

Falsification: On the Role of the Empirical in J. G. Fichte's Transcendental Method

F. Scott Scribner

It seems counter-intuitive that transcendental philosophy and its method could give any role to empirical experience in determining its own truth content. Nevertheless, such a view I contend has prevented interpreters of Fichte's work from fully understanding Fichte's own unique conception of transcendental philosophy as one which importantly depends upon empirical experience.¹

In fact, the idea that transcendental arguments, in order to defend against skepticism, must in some way depend upon empirical experience is far from unusual. Such an idea was not only present in Fichte's day, it has also been central to more contemporary discussions surrounding the value of transcendental arguments. For instance, Barry Stroud has pointed

- 1 Robert R. Williams¹ is one of the few interpreters who recognizes the unique role the empirical plays in Fichte's understanding of the transcendental. I am greatly indebted to Williams' work, as is clear throughout this paper. However, my work remains strongly divergent from Williams. In particular, I disagree with Williams' use of the term verification, and argue that the notion of falsification is a more fitting account of Fichte's view of the relation of the empirical to the transcendental. See, Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte, Hegel, and the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 37–43. Although I believe Fichte still hopes that a verification of his transcendental claims are possible - for instance, in his search for a material proof of idealist claims with the notion of a *Physicirung des Idealismus* in the *Tagebuch Über den Animalischen Magnetismus* - this mere hope does not fit well with the rigor he himself recognizes his new transcendental method would require. See my article; »Die 'Physicirung des Idealismus' im Tagebuch über den animalischen Magnetismus. Die letzte Wissenschaftslehre oder Das Ende des Idealismus?«, in *Fichte-Studien* (Bd. 17–18): *Die Spätphilosophie J.G. Fichtes*, Hg., Wolfgang H Schrader, pp. 319–328, Amsterdam: Ropodi-Verlag, 2001.

out, in his own assessment of the power of the transcendental argument before skepticism, that the issue of the verification of transcendental arguments –whereby empirical proof seeks to verify a transcendental claim- is indeed an important one. He suggests that *if* transcendental argument looks to empirical proof to buttress or verify its claim, then the transcendental argument is at best redundant. It is important to note that Stroud's more contemporary analysis in many ways reiterates the very paradox Fichte encounters: on the one hand, to embrace verification as a means to buttress transcendental arguments against skepticism renders the transcendental argument itself redundant, and thus unnecessary, while on the other hand, by jettisoning verificationism, the transcendental argument stands without proof, and suffers defeat at the hands of skepticism.² While transcendental philosophy would certainly hope to provide some sort of proof against its skeptic critics, it seems to be left in a very difficult situation. After all, the issue of empirical proof was no small matter for Fichte and German Idealism generally, insofar as the rise of materialist science would pose a serious enough threat – ultimately – to spell the end for idealism.

While Fichte certainly felt a tension similar to the one Stroud articulates in his account of the empirical's relation to the transcendental in terms of *verification*, I will argue that it is Fichte's language of *falsification* – in lieu of verification- that goes some distance in avoiding the paradox Stroud presents. In other words, while Stroud speaks of verification, a situation whereby the empirical would *positively* confirm a transcendental claim, such an affirmative mode provides too strong a proof. Its reference to the empirical makes the transcendental claim itself redundant and therefore unnecessary. In developing Fichte's own unique reference to the role of the empirical in his transcendental method I am arguing that one should not speak of verificationism, but rather of falsifiability. And it is precisely this notion of falsification that is key to any understanding of Fichte's own unique conception of the transcendental as one which depends upon empirical experience.

2 For a good over-view of Stroud's work within the context of the continuing problems presented by transcendental arguments see Roberts Stern's collection. Robert Stern, *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2003).

(1) While Fichte's precise articulation of the role of the empirical within transcendental philosophy was unique, the problem empiricism would pose to transcendental philosophy stood as one of the defining issues of Post-Kantian German Idealism. After all, if it was the empiricism of Humean skepticism that first dogged Kant out of his slumber and stood as a continuous threat to his transcendental project, it was Post-Kantian Idealism's profound dissatisfaction with his account of the source of empiricism, beyond the limit of knowledge in the thing-in-itself, that would catalyze the idealist call for a more adequate grounding, and re-conceptualization of transcendental philosophy itself. While admittedly one does not readily think of the role played by the empirical in transcendental philosophy, such a trajectory is clear not only in the more evident example of Hegel's re-casting of the thing-in-itself through the empirical cultural history of the development of spirit, it is also present in one of the first breaks with Kant that – arguably – marks the very first emergence of Post-Kantian Idealism itself. It is here, in the *Aenesidemus Review*, that Fichte takes Rheinhold to task for his all too analytic conception of the transcendental and for his failing to give the empirical its due – a critique that would ultimately drive Fichte to his own unique notion of the *Tathandlung*.

At first glance, talk of the empirical might seem misplaced. After all, Fichte would still seem to stand as the transcendental philosopher *par excellence*. After all, (a) he developed a genetic reconstruction of the I's self-development from feeling to self-consciousness; (b) he would insist that (transcendental) idealism be chosen over empiricism, materialism and, in short, dogmatism, for the sake of freedom; and (c) he encouraged that one take up the project of transcendental philosophy, as a *Wissenschaftslehre*, as an experimental project which ought to animate the very spirit of one's existence. In this sense, Fichte is without a doubt committed to transcendental philosophy. But what does transcendental philosophy mean for Fichte? The question, of course, turns on what one means by 'transcendental'. As is widely acknowledged, the method of Fichte's transcendental project is clearly different than Kant's. And while interpreters of Fichte, for instance, have rightly pointed out that Fichte is centrally concerned with the transcendental method *as a process*, few have paid attention to the unique role Fichte accords the empirical in his reformulation of the tran-

scendental method.³ How then is one to understand the empirical within Fichte's transcendental project? This stands as our guiding question.

Now the significance of the empirical for Fichte's transcendental method first became clear to me in his more socially oriented work, the *Grundlage des Naturrechts*. In this work it became apparent to me that Fichte felt a need to supplement his transcendental account of the deduction of the other in the GNR, as I have argued elsewhere, with the addition of an empirical account.⁴ One is therefore led to ask the following: Why would Fichte attempt to explain the *actual* dynamic of intersubjective recognition (*Anerkennung*) and the summons (*Aufforderung*), if his intent was merely to deduce the other as transcendently necessary for freedom and self-consciousness? Why look for an empirical verification of a claim that is exclusively transcendental?⁵

Not surprisingly, the answer to such a question is complex. I will begin by arguing that Fichte re-developed and expanded Kantian transcendental philosophy in such a way that transcendental philosophy could no longer remain wholly independent of the historical and empirical world. As Robert Williams has argued, by both developing the transcendental as a process and recognizing that the transcendental account could no longer be understood to be ontologically constitutive of the world, Fichte would ultimately loosen the transcendental structure in such a way that it would require a »pragmatic verification« in the historical, empirical, life-world.⁶ While we have already suggested that the language of verification is mis-

3 Wayne Martin has emphasized in his work that it is Fichte's understanding of the notion of the transcendental as a process that is a key feature which distinguishes it from Kant's articulation of the transcendental. See Martin's *Idealism and Objectivity*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

4 I address the problem of the empirical in Fichte's GNR in great detail in the following paper: »The ›Subtle Matter‹ of Intersubjectivity in the *Grundlage des Naturrechts*« in *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, eds. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 65–79.

5 The precise relation between the GNR and the *Wissenschaftslehre* is greatly contested within Fichte scholarship. The issue is whether the GNR constitutes a distinct project for Fichte, or it is merely in some respect a continuation of the broader project of the WL. I am merely stating that it was the problem of the empirical within the GNR that led me to investigate this issue within the WL.

6 Williams refers to a »loosening« of the transcendental structure and its need for a »pragmatic verification«.

leading, and it is more accurate to speak of falsification, Williams' account of Fichte's recasting of the transcendental, as one that is open to the practical, lived world, is nevertheless insightful in understanding Fichte's own unique development of the transcendental.

Fichte's affirmation of the practical choice of freedom is already inherent in the very structure of the project of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. For instance, Fichte's well known account in the *First Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre* of the initial impasse between idealism and dogmatism is an impasse which, he claims, can only be decided on practical grounds.⁷ His conclusion, that such an impasse must be decided on practical grounds (since first principles cannot be proven), is a victory for idealism precisely through such a pragmatic appeal: Fichte sides with freedom. Despite this conclusion, however, such a decision can never eradicate the specter of dogmatism, which Fichte identifies with empiricism, realism, and materialism (IWL, 15–17). In other words, Fichte's dismissal of dogmatism in favor of idealism does not discount the possible truth of dogmatism, but merely discounts such a choice from practical considerations alone. In fact, the fundamental task of the WL is to establish an ultimate unity or synthesis of real and ideal worlds.

For Kant, transcendental philosophy offered us an apriori mode of knowledge, a »knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects insofar as this mode of knowledge of objects is possible apriori« (CPR, B25).⁸ Yet while Fichte would continue to carry out the spirit of Kantian philosophy, he would transform the transcendental method in two important respects.⁹ First, Fichte was less concerned with the knowledge of an object, understood as a product constituted in and through the transcendental method, than with the activity or process of the transcendental method itself. For Fichte, one

7 I cite Fichte's work from *Fichtes Werke* (11 vols.), hrsg. I. H. Fichte (reprinted from 1834/35), Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971. Cited as FW, followed by volume and page number. I have used the following English translation with minor alterations: J. G. Fichte: *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, trans and ed. Daniel Breazeale. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994. Cited as IWL.

8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965.

9 Fichte, of course, saw himself as the only true Kantian. He writes that the WL »is nothing other than the Kantian philosophy properly understood« (IWL, 52)

does not take part in the transcendental project by becoming a disciple of Kant or merely reading him. Rather, its method is a continually developing project; a project or activity that one must engage in on one's own. In fact, in the *Second Introduction to the WL* Fichte explicitly refers to the transcendental investigation in terms of an »experiment« (IWL, 37). He explains that while other philosophies, like Kantian philosophy, »consist entirely in ... arguments that they themselves construct,« and thus, in short, traffic in »dead concepts,« »the WL is something vital and active, something that generates cognitions out of itself and by means of itself « (IWL, 36–37). In fact, the *First Introduction to the WL* begins, quite tellingly, with an imperative: it is an imperative to take up philosophy, and transcendental philosophy as an *experimental practice*. Fichte implores: »Attend to yourself; turn your gaze from everything surrounding you and look within yourself: this is the first demand philosophy makes to anyone who studies it.« (IWL, 7).

Now Fichte's emphasis on transcendental philosophy as a first person, experimental method, would also importantly transform the scope and limits of Kantian style epistemology. For instance, while Kant's Copernican Revolution showed that our own cognitive structure played a central role in the ontological constitution of objects, Fichte could not adhere to such a rigorous interpretation. Thus, although concepts without intuitions are blind, for Fichte, the legislative power of the Kantian transcendental apriori is largely a construction of thought in which validity is either affirmed or denied at the level of the transcendental deduction. Fichte's emphasis on the experimental activity involved in the transcendental method, however, describes the transcendental model as a mere hypothesis that depends upon a post-transcendental move.

In other words, because the Fichtean ego itself has no ontological status, and is not even a substratum, it stands as a mere hypothesis (FW:I, 515). The logical principles of identity, difference, and sufficient reason, are given coherence through the postulation of a hypothetical ego whose unifying activities of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis amounts to a speculative unity, ought, or ideal, which ultimately cannot operate without reference to the real.¹⁰ This co-dependence of the theoretical and practical series within Fichte's work offers a new understanding of the role of transcendental

¹⁰ Williams, 40.

constitution in which transcendental authority is no longer wholly independent of empirical considerations. While the epistemological claims of Kantian transcendental philosophy could be sorted out at the transcendental level, the hypothetical structure of the Fichtean transcendental requires a post-transcendental move. In order to grasp the nature of this move, however, we must first understand Fichte's conception of the relation between the empirical and the transcendental. We first turn to Fichte's most explicit remarks on the empirical falsifiability of transcendental claims before we seek to incorporate this understanding into his more dynamic integration of both the empirical and the transcendental as two co-dependent perspectives in what he calls the dual series.

(2) In the *First Introduction to the WL* Fichte rhetorically asks »how could anything that limited itself to experience be called philosophy« (IWL, 32)? Fichte suggests that philosophy, and in particular transcendental philosophy, is something wholly independent of experience. Transcendental philosophy is something which determines and gives shape to experience, not the inverse. Thus, Fichte warns, »(T)hose who advise you to keep your eye constantly focused upon experience when you philosophize and advising you to fudge its factors as procedure {is} as dishonest as it is superficial« (IWL, 33). In other words, one should not allow experience to determine transcendental philosophy: such a procedure is a sham. One ought not to look to empirical experience either to shape transcendental claims, or to verify their assertions.

Yet what is so perplexing about the position Fichte establishes is that while empirical experience cannot and should not determine the content of transcendental claims, it nevertheless can determine its validity – at least negatively. Fichte writes: »If the results of such philosophy do not agree with experience, then the philosophy given is surely false « (IWL, 32). In other words, *it is with reference to experience that transcendental claims are falsifiable*. In this respect, it seems that Fichte finds a more likely heir in Karl Popper than Barry Stroud. The philosopher of science Karl Popper explains the advantages of falsification as follows: »Falsificationists ... believe ... that they have discovered logical arguments which show that the programme of the first group [verificationists] cannot be carried out: that we can never give positive reasons which justify the belief that a theory is true. (...). We hold that this ideal can be realized, very simply, by recognizing that the rationality of science lies not in its habit of appealing to em-

pirical evidence in support of its dogmas – as astrologers do so too – but solely in the critical approach – in an attitude which of course, involves the critical use, among other arguments, of empirical evidence (especially in refutations).«¹¹

Popper's account of falsification, as the refutation of conjecture or theory as the central motor of scientific progress, seems to confirm that Fichte's designation of his greater project as *Wissenschaftslehre* is perhaps worthy of its name, and further that his attempt to integrate empirical proof into his transcendental claims in terms of falsification is precisely the correct move. As a science of knowledge the *Wissenschaftslehre* is right to understand transcendental philosophy as an experimental practice in which transcendental hypotheses or conjectures are continuously subjected to attempts to falsify them through reference to empirical experience. One cannot rightly prove transcendental claims in any positive verificationist sense. As both Popper and Fichte recognize *Wissenschaft* can only really proceed through falsification.

While, of course, Fichte is of the opinion that experience would almost always conform and thus stand as the ultimate proof to a procedurally rigorous transcendental philosophy – like that carried out in the *Wissenschaftslehre* –, what happens when transcendental philosophy does indeed need correction through reference to experience? Is this not an instance in which transcendental philosophy keeps its eye on experience? Further, if this new method of transcendental philosophy requires a post-transcendental falsification, then it would seem to be a procedure that to some degree is determined precisely by empirical concerns. The nature of the relation of the empirical and transcendental in Fichte's philosophy, needs to be further clarified through an analysis of these two orders as they arise in Fichte's concept of the WL. These two orders, the empirical and the transcendental, are further clarified by Fichte through his exploration of the dual series of real and the ideal.

(3) Fichte explains in the *Second Introduction to the WL* that »(T)he WL contains two very different series of mental acting (*des geistigen Handelns*): that of the I the philosopher is observing, as well as the series con-

11 Karl R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. (London: Routledge, 1963), 228–231.

sisting of the philosopher's own observations« (IWL, 37). What Fichte is distinguishing are two different orders of experience, understood as ordinary consciousness and philosophical consciousness respectively. And the failure to recognize the mutual existence and dependence of these two orders, Fichte warns, »is one of the main reasons the WL has been misunderstood« (IWL, 37–38). In brief, what Fichte is suggesting is that while on the one hand ordinary consciousness cannot be readily understood without the clarifying theoretical apparatus of transcendental philosophy, so too would transcendental philosophy be a pure logical abstraction without the pragmatic reference to practical experience. And, of course, what we are concerned with empirical experience of ordinary consciousness.

There have been two central interpretations of the relation between these orders. The first, that represented for instance by the work of Günter Zöller and others, argues that for Fichte the real is essentially still an intellectual category. Zöller writes, »(T)he sense of ›practice‹ (Praxis) introduced in Fichte's account of the I as originally practical ... is decidedly intellectual«. ¹² While there is much evidence for this view, the danger of embracing its particular interpretative tact is that, in emphasizing the intellectual form of the real, it tends to collapse the two orders, reducing the real to the ideal, and thereby obscuring the unique role of the empirical in Fichte's new account of the transcendental. The other view, that represented by commentators like Robert R. Williams, argues that the real and the ideal must truly stand as two orders if the Fichtean transcendental is not to »be a closed system of thought determinations measured simply by the criterion of coherence«. ¹³ In other words, although the ideal stands as a *Sollen* in Fichte's system, it is a task that is not yet accomplished. And the correlation between the transcendental and empirical is such that while the ideal has established the task, the transcendental order is nevertheless »subject to modification, if not correction, by the historical order«. ¹⁴

Each view has its strengths and limitations. While the perspective represented by Williams importantly embraces the corrective power of the practical empirical world in determining the validity of transcendental claims, his explicit language of »verification« makes clear that he goes too

12 See, Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 79 .

13 Williams, 41.

14 Ibid., 41.

far in according the empirical a positive, corrective role. Yet if Williams falls prey to an error of excess, the severely limited power Zöller accords to the empirical life-world by emphasizing the intellectual aspects of the real/ideal relation might best be described as a deficiency. In short, in re-thinking the empirical's relation to the transcendental, if one view gives too much emphasis to the empirical, the other too readily embraces the side of the transcendental. The empirical must be accorded a role in transcendental experience. To either deny it such a role or to minimize it to the point of ineffectiveness is the expression of any overly intellectualized account; yet to allow the empirical a robustness that would give it the positive power to verify transcendental claims is an error no less serious. It is for this reason that Fichte's account of the dual series must be re-interpreted in view of his account of the falsifiability of transcendental claims.

Ordinary consciousness may require philosophical consciousness for its explanation, but the transcendental method of philosophical consciousness (in turn) remains existentially rooted within the concerns of practical, empirical experience. After all, for Fichte, one recalls, first principles are not something that can be proven. The choice between idealism and dogmatism was a choice motivated by practical concerns- specifically, the concern for freedom (IWL, 15–18). And it is in this sense that the ideal and real stand as a dual series whose seeming independence is actually constituted in an implicit co-dependence.

Now Fichte's complaint – that dogmatism is a realism, a materialism, and, in short, a fatalism (IWL, 16) – stems from his belief that dogmatism denounces human freedom in its very principles: it reduces the free-will of the human intellect to the principle of causality so that it becomes a mere pawn in the structure of a larger causal series (IWL, 22). Fichte is lamenting dogmatism's disregard for the practical choice for freedom which ought to ground otherwise undecidable first principles (IWL, 22). With dogmatism, the »real« series of causality is one that reduces freedom and spirit to a mere causal explanation. In a more contemporary register, for example, such an approach would reduce the phenomena of mind to the materialist discourse of the physical anatomy of the brain. Yet, like the preservative force of Cartesian dualism against the onslaught of materialist explanation, Fichte's dual series of the real and the ideal refuses the purely causal explanation – on practical grounds, for the sake of freedom.

(4) In the first part of the WL of 1794 Fichte presents a genetic history of consciousness that reconstructs the developmental history of consciousness through its logical categories. As we suggested, however, to the extent that this transcendental reconstruction is not directly constitutive of experience (as it was for Kant), it stands as a mere hypothesis that awaits empirical falsification. Here we see the WL's double series at work. Philosophical consciousness must stand in conjunction with ordinary consciousness; the theoretical must reference the practical, and vice-versa. The central problem is one we have already encountered. The traditional answer is that one sees empirical proof as either redundant of transcendental claims or as making the them altogether unnecessary. I hope to detail these two positions within Fichte's dual series as a means to articulate a path beyond this impasse.

The first option, a prospective relation, would understand the transcendental to stand as a hypothesis that awaits a practical or empirico-historical falsification. The second, a retrospective relation, would hold that transcendental reflection, like all philosophical experience, is merely a second order reflection that can only come after or follow experience. In fact, both versions seem to exist within the WL.¹⁵ The first understands the tension between the theoretical and empirical (or ideal and real) series from the perspective of the theoretical, while the second views this tension from the view point of the practical. Still, Fichte's explanation of this dual series is not entirely satisfactory. While in articles like the *Review of Anesidemus* Fichte explains that the theoretical and practical aspects of this dual series stand in a circular relation (EPW, 75–76), so that, for instance, with the termination of the ascent of the theoretical, begins the descent into the practical, etc., at other times Fichte suggests that no logical ordering or coincidence of this series is even possible. Why this is so requires us to return to address more explicitly the status of the transcendental in Fichte's work.

This tension between the practical and the theoretical, that forms the very essence of the WL, is also the very source of Fichte's seemingly unusual explanation of the transcendental and its relation to the empirical. Transcendental philosophy ought to be a closed system which is complete

15 Williams uses the terminology of prospective and retrospective relation. Williams, 40–41.

unto itself. However, to the extent that transcendental philosophy is rooted in ordinary consciousness and, according to Fichte, cannot stand as an abstract system – insofar as the real cannot be reduced to the ideal-, it requires a post-transcendental move: transcendental conscious must be subject to falsification by ordinary consciousness.

In the WL the practical seems to guide the theoretical from the outset. Insisting that first principles are not decidable by the demands of logic, but by practical demands alone, Fichte recognizes that the interests of ordinary consciousness guide and establish the horizon and concern of the theoretical. Philosophy itself then begins with a pragmatic decision. Yet although the WL begins by recognizing the general undecidability of first principles, and the consequent priority of the practical, the unity of this double series – that is, the unity of the real and ideal-, itself nevertheless stands as a practical demand – as an »ought« (*Sollen*). For Fichte, this striving for unity is the key to understanding how for Kant reason can be practical. In the *Anesidemus Review* he explains: »In the pure ego reason ... is practical only insofar as it strives to unite the two ... a practical philosophy emerges by going through in descending order the stages which one must ascend in theoretical philosophy«. ¹⁶ Fichte began this ascent in the first half of the WL of 1794 through a genetic reconstruction of the logical categories of consciousness. This reconstruction, however, was merely a hypothesis that would be subject to practical, empirical falsification. In other words, the descent into the practical retraces the theoretical ascent in reverse order which subjects the transcendental hypothesis to a possible falsification. The precise relation between ordinary and philosophical consciousness, between the truth of practical, empirical concerns and that of transcendental philosophy, is not easy to sort out. The circular ascending and descending series (with an ultimate demand for unity), does not establish a one to one identity between this real/ideal series. As a consequence, what is established is a correlation; a tentative correlation that prevents either account from affirming a closure, or truth. After all, ordinary consciousness' failure to falsify a transcendental claim is not an affirmation that such a transcendental hypothesis is necessarily true.

While understood in the context of the spirit of Kantian philosophy, Fichte would seem to embrace truth in the form of transcendental truth.

16 Ibid., 40.

Nevertheless, one of the practical demands of an ordinary, historical, empirical consciousness, is the call for a revision of this transcendental truth, so that the Fichtean transcendental cannot be conceived apart from practical demands. Thus, as we have noted through brief reference to Fichte's search for an empirical proof for transcendental claims in the GNR through reference to »subtle matter,« while Fichte thinks that history and the empirical world will largely bear out the hypothesis established by the transcendental method, it often does not. Fichte must begrudgingly recognize and embrace just what his very system of the WL offers. In other words, although the empirical world does not directly dictate the level of transcendental analysis, the practical historico-empirical demands upon the finite subject, does necessarily loosen the scope, structure, and claims of transcendental philosophy as traditionally understood in the Kantian sense.¹⁷ The world is no longer understood as the direct effect of transcendental constitution: as with any true science of knowledge, transcendental hypotheses are now subject to falsification. Still, neither the real nor the ideal, neither the empirical nor the transcendental, can be reduced to one another. Their unity remains an »ought«: it is a practical demand on the order of the real that stands simultaneously as the culminating point of the ideal.

To the extent that to embrace either side apart from the other is mistake, Fichte will conclude in the WL of 1794 that taken individually »both views are wrong«. As a consequence, one can embrace neither transcendental philosophy in the Kantian sense, nor dogmatism in the form of materialism, empiricism, or realism. With the insight that »the second series is no new series at all,« but »merely the first in reverse« (FW: I 224/SK, 200), Fichte asks the penetrating question of »how ideality and reality can be one and the same; how they differ only in the manner regarding them, and how the one can be inferred from the other« (FW: I, 226/SK, 202). Fichte realizes that what he is left with is a gap between »incapacity and demand«. He explains that »(t)he mind lingers in this conflict and wavers between the two – wavers between the requirement and the impossibility of carrying it out« (FW: I, 225/SK, 201). Not surprisingly this definition of wavering between incapacity and demand nearly mirrors Fichte's definition of the imagination: that element that stands in many respects as the

17 Ibid., 41

touchstone for his project and the center-piece of his recasting of the very task of transcendental philosophy.¹⁸ The imagination is key for Fichte's work precisely because neither the striving of transcendental hypothesis nor the definitive proof of empirical verification makes any sense on its own. Just as the productive imagination arises in the endless dynamic of striving and resistance, so too do the ideal and real aspects, transcendental and empirical worlds, form the basis of *Wissenschaft*, as that vital, creative, and experimental enterprise called life. Like Fichte, Popper too will recognize falsification as a catalyst for that creative enterprise called science which, understood in this light, establishes an undeniable link between epistemology and the imagination. As Popper explains, »the real dangers to the progress of science is not the likelihood of its being completed, but such things as lack of imagination «.¹⁹

The continued process of transcendental philosophy as an experimental practice, whose conjectures remain open to empirical falsifiability recall for us that profoundly practical foundation within Fichte's work that Popper too affirms in his suggestion that science is not merely about truth, but an »interesting truth,« and one that will help us solve our problems.²⁰ Like scientific hypotheses, Fichte's transcendental requires an empirical falsification. Far from being opposed to the transcendental, the empirical is an intimate part of it. As Fichte forcefully asserts: »(F)or a full-blown idealism, apriori and aposteriori are not two different things. ... Anyone who is a different opinion does not know what he is talking about« (IWL, 32).

18 Fichte explains the productive imagination in the *WL of 1794* as a wavering or play between infinite striving and its limitation (FW: I, 215).

19 Popper, 217.

20 Ibid., 228–231.

The Self as the World Into Itself. Towards Fichte's Conception of Subjectivity

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Standing historically between the two intellectual giants, Kant and Hegel, Fichte is often considered as a mere »mediator« in the dialogue of the two genii.¹ Such an approach is not only mistaken, but it also essentially devalues the real philosophical significance of Fichte, especially in respect to his account of subject and subjectivity. In fact, Fichte's deep revision of the Kantian concept of the subject is key to the emergence of post-Kantian German Idealism. Neither Schelling's nor Hegel's advancements in the theory of subject and subjectivity can be fully understood and appreciated without considering Fichte's valuable additions and profound revisions of the Kantian concept of the transcendental subject.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief sketch of Fichte's account of the self and discuss it as a significant and unique contribution to the modern and 19th century theory of subjectivity that must be studied for

1 It should be noted that surely not all investigations into Fichte's philosophy undermine or misrepresent his role in the development of German Idealism, but the number of adequate and realistic interpretations is not very extensive. For positive examples in Anglophone literature see: Daniel Breazeale, »Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self«, *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classic German Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 87–114; Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self. Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century*. (Cambridge University Press, 2005)

its own sake and not seen merely as the stepping stones along the path leading to absolute knowledge about subject and subjectivity. This discussion mainly focuses on Fichte's early works: his Jena projects of *Wissenschaftslehre*, including the 1794/95 *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* and *Wissenschaftslehre novo methodo* (1796/1797). The choice of works to use is not a random one. For Fichte the Jena period was a time of profound searching for the foundations and structures of his philosophical system. He found such a foundation in a specifically shaped concept of subjectivity. Although that concept will be further detailed by Fichte in his later writings, it is already well articulated in the Jena works. Furthermore, in the later writings, the concept itself remains essentially the same in its major ideas and facets. This is especially true of Fichte's account of the selfhood.

This paper first discusses theoretical roots and an evolving process of Fichte's conception of subject and subjectivity. Then it considers Fichte's conception of the self how it is introduced in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The final section provides a brief reflection on Fichte's account of selfhood by placing it in the context of German idealists' discussions about subjectivity.

This investigation does not intend to reconstruct a complete picture of Fichte's account of subjectivity. It is complex enough to defy the grasp of many scholars. Instead, this paper attempts to provide a conceptual outline of the main points of the subjectivity theory introduced by Fichte in order to leave detailed, perhaps expository, analysis for future investigations.

1. Fichte and Challenges of Philosophy of Subjectivity

Fichte's interest in subjectivity arises directly from his meditation on Reinhold's Philosophy of Elements (*Elementar-Philosophie*),² and his occupation with Schulze's *Aenesidemus*.³ Despite all the differences between Rein-

2 See: Carl Leonhard Reinhold, *Essay towards a New Theory of the Human Faculty of Representation*. (*Versuch einer neuen Theory des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*, Prague and Jena, 1789.) Parts II and III of the essay contain the only complete exposition of the Philosophy of Elements that Reinhold ever provided.

3 See: Gottlob Ernst Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Prof. Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (1792); reprinted in

hold's and Aenesidemus' metaphysical and epistemological positions, the call for a philosophy of subjectivity is the point of their, if not conceptual then at least ideological (though virtual), reconciliation. Reinhold's final retreat into subjectivity⁴ is provoked by Aenesidemus' merely subjectivistic approach to consciousness and its content.⁵ As George di Giovanni points out, »[Reinhold's] interest had been from the start in the subject as a real principle of mental life. Aenesidemus' push was all that was needed to resolve in favor of subjectivism whatever ambiguity there still was in his mind.«⁶ Reflecting on the results of both Reinhold's investigations and Aenesidemus' insights into consciousness, Fichte sees his primary goal in developing a systematic account of consciousness, which would explain the evolving (arising from its pre-conscious past) and the genesis of consciousness from its own intuitively established first principle.

Fichte realizes that neither Reinhold's principle of consciousness nor Aenesidemus's principle of contradiction can serve as such a principle because both are limited; each lacks something substantial. Fichte is confident (and he grants it to Aenesidemus) that the principle of contradiction must be the highest principle of philosophy as a science of consciousness. Yet, as it is introduced in Aenesidemus, it is still a formal principle that has no real significance; it necessarily presupposes another principle, which still needs to be defined (discovered). As for Reinhold, Fichte does not deny that his principle of consciousness is a first principle, but he argues that this is the first principle of only the *given facts* of consciousness. It thus has the power to describe the (given) empirical content of consciousness, but cannot explain acts that »originate« consciousness and give rise to it. Being unsatisfied with Reinhold's and Aenesidemus's first principles, Fichte searches for a principle of consciousness which would be so consti-

Aetas Kantiana, Bruxelles, 1969.

- 4 The point of that »retreat« is marked by Reinhold's essay »Ausführliche Darstellung des negativen Dogmatismus oder des metaphysischen Skeptizismus« (*Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisherigen Missverständnisse der Philosophen*, Vol. II, Jena, 1790, pp. 159–206), which was a critical reply to Aenesidemus.
- 5 According to Aenesidemus, a fundamental feature of consciousness is that »every consciousness contains only a fact which is present simply *in us*« (*Aenesidemus*, p. 383).
- 6 George di Giovanni, »The Facts of Consciousness«, *Between Kant and Hegel. Text in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, translated, with introduction by George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris, Hackett Publishers, 2000, p. 26.

tuted that it could express the complexity of the process of consciousness, including the mechanism of how reflective consciousness can arise out of intuitive awareness, and also be granted to exist. Fichte finds such a principle not in the *facts* (immediate data) of consciousness (*Tatsache*), but in the conscious *act* (*Tathandlung*).⁷ The significance of the latter is that it has a »synthetic function«: it »differentiates« and it »connects« at the same time. Yet in order for synthesis to take place, what has to be synthesized must already be there, and not as something that is given as a fact, but rather as something that is posited and counter-posed in a conscious act itself. That explains why, instead of formulating a single self-evident principle (*Grundsatz*) of self-consciousness, Fichte introduces three fundamental principles: the principles of self-positing, counter-positing, and limitation (concrete synthesis of both). More importantly, according to Fichte, only together, in their implicit interrelation and unity, are they able to »express« the fundamental structures of subjectivity as such. This complexity, already a part of the very starting point of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, has often been ignored. As a result, Fichte's conception of subjectivity has often been discussed only in terms of the first principle (with less frequency, in terms of the first two principles) while two others were either completely ignored or considered separately and not in a systematic unity with the first one.

That approach might certainly have been influenced by the way Fichte establishes the principle of the self-positing I (the first principle) in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, where he postulates that »the I posits itself as an I.« Since the activity of »self-positing« is taken to be the fundamental feature of I-hood in general, the first principle then states that »the I posits itself as self-positing.« This implies that the I is immediately present to itself and as such is in the state of self-identity that is not just presupposed, but intuitively established by the first principle. It seems to follow thus that there is no need for further fundamental principles since all of them are already contained (as in a cocoon) in the first one. Although at first glance such interpretation seems plausible, this is not what Fichte in fact has in mind. The most important of Fichte's philosophical convictions (indebted to Kant), which determines the strategy of his *Grundlage* and also the new development of his system (manifested in recasting its first principles) in

7 See: *Fichtes Werke*, vol.1, p. 91.

the *Wissenschaftslehre novo methodo*,⁸ is the belief that human subjectivity is the unified expression of a complex structure. The philosophical investigation into this complex structure is the investigation into the totality and conditions of consciousness. Yet the philosophical inquiry into the I (or finite subjectivity) is the construction of the I out of the intricacy of consciousness in the unity of its theoretical and practical employment. The importance of the principle of the self-positing I lies in what it suggests about the conditions of consciousness itself and in how those conditions can reveal the conceptual structure of subjectivity. The principle is thus assigned a great methodological significance in the system and also in the construction of subjectivity itself: it has a »regulative« function⁹ and as such provides not only the inquiry into the *Wissenschaftslehre* (and thus into subjectivity), but also a definite direction toward its systematic wholeness and completeness.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the principle of the self-positing of I by itself cannot account for the whole complexity of subjectivity – especially in respect to the fundamental acts of the ›differentiation‹ that give

8 I take it for granted that the 1794/95 *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (translated into English by Peter Heath as *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, in Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. and ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs, Cambridge, 1982) is not identical to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and does not provide an accurate systematic presentation of the foundations of his system. As Daniel Breazeale points out, »the purely tentative or preliminary character of this work was clearly signaled by the author himself in the subtitle he insisted on adding to the published version: »a manuscript for the use of my students.« (Editor's Introduction, in *IWL*, p. xi.) The second presentation of the foundations of the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* – the *Wissenschaftslehre novo methodo* – works out a completely new concept of the first principles of the system, which gives rise to a new approach to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and its structure. For a detailed discussion of the role of the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* for the development of Fichte's philosophical system, see Daniel Breazeale, Editor's Introduction, in *FTP*, 1992.

9 In Jena, concerning with development of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte writes that it »will actually be evolved only from the latter two principles, since here the first has merely regulative validity.« (*Fichtes Werke*, vol. 1, p. 222)

10 See: *Ibid*, p. 115. James D. Reid shows that such an interpretation of Fichte's first principle is not only possible, but is »consistent with the subsequent ethical assessment of the first principle in *Grundlage* III, and it is further supported by two *Nachschriften* of Fichte's lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*.« (»On the Unity of Theoretical Subjectivity in Kant and Fichte«, *The Review of Metaphysics* 57 (December 2003), p. 264.)

rise to consciousness in the first place – and the philosophical construction of the I out of the intricacy of consciousness and its conditions must be expressed in and through the display of the three first principles.

This consideration can explain Fichte's attempt in (Part I of) the *Grundlage* to connect his starting point, the principle of the self-positing of I, to the logical law of identity and to introduce two additional first principles, which he ties to the logical laws of non-contradiction and sufficient reason. Although Fichte's undertaking is often taken as sudden and much obscured, in fact it seems to be a result of a careful deliberation on the philosopher's part. Still, in his *Review of Aenesidemus* (1794), Fichte clearly hints at the possibility that the first principle might be the traditional principle of identity, re-stated in such a way as to include an extra dimension of existential significance. He also suggests here that this significance is in some way related to the principle of contradiction.¹¹ It should also be noted that in his *Wissenschaftslehre novo methodo*, where he completely revised and rewrote the presentation of the first principles of his system, he conceptually retains the three first principles and builds his complex account of subjectivity upon them. Only instead of presenting the reader with abstract and non-elucidated principles (of the *Grundlage*), here Fichte commences with the easily accessible and thus simple »postulate«, which requires thinking the I and reflecting upon that thinking. Yet, once Fichte turns to the issue of what is involved in the process of thinking of any object, the simple act of thinking and reflecting upon the thought of the I quickly becomes very complicated. He resorts then to the help of the principles of absolute positing and counter-positing of the I established in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* (and re-introduced in the *Grundlage*) to elucidate the »identity in difference« of the original I and to explain the acts of »distinguishing« and »referring« which give rise to self-consciousness in the first place.

To illustrate this point, it is crucial to consider Fichte's conception of the unity of subjectivity as it is developed in the *Wissenschaftslehre novo methodo*. The conception is very complex, and it includes different dimensions of an investigation into the structure of the I. It ranges from the I's

11 J. G. Fichte, *Review of Aenesidemus*, translation and notes by George di Giovanni, *Between Kant and Hegel. Text in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, translated, with introduction by George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris, Hackett Publishers, 2000, pp. 138–39. (GA, vol. 1, pp. 5–6.)

awareness of objects in the sensible world to the self-awareness of the I in the intelligible realm of freedom. Rather than trying to discuss that in detail, I shall focus on Fichte's notion (and mechanism) of the »self-positing« I and see how this notion shapes his account of all-encompassing subjectivity; subjectivity, which ultimately is a world unto itself.

2. *Fichte's First Principle and the Conception of the Self*

Fichte begins his investigation into the structure of the I by stating that consciousness and any conscious act necessarily pre-supposes self-consciousness. The idea itself is not new; it restates the Kantian claim that »I think« must accompany all our representations. However, the realization of the idea, as well as the consequences for conception of subjectivity, are of tremendous novelty. By drawing his attention to the very characteristics of consciousness and claiming that every conscious act is the assertion of »the identity of what is real and what is ideal,«¹² Fichte not only emphasizes the point of the immediate self-identity of the I, but considers such self-identity the essence of the I-hood (*Ichheit*). He shows that this immediate presence of the I to itself is not something that is given as a psychological »fact«, nor is it an appearance of some other substance beyond the I. In Fichte's terminology, this is the activity of »self-positing« of I, which is understood as an »action« of the I, but the action that is identical with its own product and thus with the very existence of the I itself. This notion of the self-positing activity of the I is Fichte's interpretation of the Kantian notion of autonomy. The activity of the I is internally determined and freely applied to any sensory content. However, as such it never occurs within empirical consciousness; rather it must be presupposed (»posited«) in order to guarantee the »identity in difference« necessary to explain the conditions and possibility of consciousness. As Fichte points out, »Our thinking always involves a connection, a movement of thought in a certain direction, an act of synthesis, without which there would be no thinking at all. Hence, the content of our thoughts is never anything taken by itself,

12 *FTP*, § 17, p. 359.

but is always a relationship between two things. [...] Consequently, we never have anything but interrelated syntheses.«¹³

Synthesis is thus the fundamental form of consciousness. Yet, although it must be presupposed, it is guaranteed by the activity of the self-relation. The identity of the real and the ideal, which is necessary for thinking, entails thus a conception of subjectivity as the original activity of self-consciousness. According to Fichte, the I is always active. Yet this activity is not a pure cognitive activity. The I, striving for self-awareness, freely determines itself to be manifested (objectified) into actuality. Hence the self-positing activity of the I is equally »practical« and »theoretical«: the act described by self-positing is both an act of »doing« and an act of »becoming aware«, an action as well as cognition. What is important here is that both acts cannot occur in isolation from each other since »the I simply posits itself« requires that the I posits both itself and its world and in this way becomes self-conscious, and thus self-aware of its freedom and its limitations.

The latter point is very important for the correct understanding of Fichte's account of subjectivity. In contrast to Hegel, who recognizes two different dimensions (tenets) of subjectivity, the »absolute subjectivity« and the »concrete empirical subjectivity« (interpreted as an individual self), which for him are both equally real, Fichte clearly states that the only actually existing and acting I is a finite, empirical, embodied, individual self.¹⁴ The I can posit itself only insofar as it posits itself as finite and limited, yet is limited not by something that is external to the I (be that not-I or even the mere abstraction in form of the »absolute I«), but rather by a »check« internally imposed upon its own activity. In the *Grundlage*, Fichte explains, »[w]hat it assumes is not a Not-I that is present outside of the I, and even a determination that is present within the I, but rather, the mere task, on the part of the I itself, of undertaking a determination within itself.«¹⁵ This »check« or *Anstoß* is the original limitation of the I to its free,

13 *Ibid.*, p. 395.

14 On rebuttal of the widespread misunderstanding about the absolute character of the I in Fichte and for the detailed analyses of finitude of the Fichtean self, see Dan Breazeale, »Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self,« in *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classic German Philosophy*, pp. 87–114, esp. 98–102.

15 SW, ed. by I.H. Fichte. Berlin: Viet, 1845–46, vol. 1, pp. 210–211.

practical activity, but this limitation is posited by the I itself, and posited by and through its own activity. *Anstoß* is present for the I only due to its outwardly striving activity. »[T]he *Anstoß* [...] occurs to the I insofar as it is active [...] . Its possibility is conditioned by the activity of the I: no activity of the I, no *Anstoß*. And *vice versa*: the I's activity of determining itself would, in turn, be conditioned by the *Anstoß*: no *Anstoß*, no self-determination. [...] [N]o self-determination, nothing objective [...] .«¹⁶ Yet, the activity required from the I is not a mere practical activity that allows the I to encounter and overcome (transcend) the »check« upon its own activity. Since the limitation presented by the *Anstoß* is itself posited by the I's activity (I posits for itself its own limitation), the inward activity of the I must be present as well. Moreover, it must be presupposed as the I's own cognition. The I cannot be conscious of itself without setting its own limit and then recognizing and transcending its own boundaries. The ability to set a limit for oneself, however, presupposes cognition for its possibility. To put it differently, the *Anstoß* is posited by the I precisely in order to »explain« to itself the latter, that is, in order to reflect upon itself or become conscious of itself. Yet, the act of setting a »limit« for oneself is an intellectually conscious activity, which necessarily requires the presence of cognition in the first place. Thus, although Fichte demonstrates that the »task of limiting itself« (real »check« on the I's activity) is a condition for the possibility of consciousness, he is not able to explain its actual occurrence without falling into the logical circle.

In *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*¹⁷ Fichte recognizes this circle as the circle of consciousness that the I finds itself trapped in: the free and infinite self-positing activity of the I requires cognition, which in turn is possible only as a result of this self-positing activity. Fichte's way out of the circle lies in the intelligible realm of freedom, in the original volition, which is prior to all empirical willing and empirical cognition. This »pure« volition is a categorical demand for action, an »ought« or internal urge for an engagement with the world, in both a theoretical and a practical fashion. This idea has important implications for Fichte's conception of subjectivity.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 212. For an in-depth analysis of the role assumed by the *Anstoß*, see Dan Breazeale, »Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self,« in *The Modern Subject*, pp. 88–98.

17 See *FTP*, § 13.

The Fichtean self is necessarily and inevitably engaged in the world, and this »engagement« is the demand which the self imposes on itself as its own determinacy. Empirical willing and cognition as well as the objective world (»realm of the things and facts«) are then seen as the sensible manifestations of the freedom and spontaneity of the self. There is, however, no gap between the self and the world; both are originally united in the notion of the self. Indeed, in order for the self to reflect upon itself, it has to find itself to be a part of the world of material objects. Hence the link between the self and the world is a fundamental condition for the very possibility of self-consciousness, and as such must be presupposed as an original determinacy. This determinacy is not of an external nature. It is present within the I itself, and although it is not posited by the I as a product of its free activity, it is »encountered therein.«¹⁸ What the I encounters is thus the »difference« between the (facticity of the) self and the world, which is originally present within the I itself. That »original difference« is the original ability of the I to »communicate« with the world and »open itself [...] to external influence.«¹⁹ Such »openness« necessarily calls for the activity of the I, but at the same time, it limits that activity, and the I posits itself only as determinate and finite. The result of such analysis is the recognition that the self cannot exist as the unlimited and absolute. The distinct characteristic of the selfhood is the ability to reflect upon itself; yet, the reflection is conceivable only as the reflection upon a limited and determinate object. This is why to Fichte the self is possible only as an acting *finite*, individual self, and never as the absolute I.

Yet, *how* is it possible for a finite being to become aware of its own cognition, which is originally posited as infinite and indeterminate? Put differently, this is a question about the individual self's ability (and also its capability) to attribute to itself its own absolute freedom. Fichte's answer to this question is strikingly simple, although deep and novel in its approach.

Perhaps the fact that we are aware of our own existence has to do with our capacity to have relations to ourselves, relations that must be regarded as a medium and condition of rationality in general, and self-consciousness in particular. Yet, our self-awareness is not possible either by intro-

¹⁸ SW, vol. 1, p. 272.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 276. This is what Dan Breazeale calls »an essential *openness* to the world«, which the I necessarily possesses. (Cf. Dan Breazeale, »Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self«, p. 99.)

spection or intuition. Even an immediate acquaintance («familiarity», *die Vertrautheit*) with oneself will not provide a productive inwardness. The self-awareness necessarily involves recognition by others, which are opposed to the I not as material objects lacking cognition, but instead as rational beings that are able to engage and interact with the I. The self-consciousness thus always presupposes a kind of *a priori* intersubjectivity. If there is no intersubjective relation, that is if the freedom of an individual is not »summoned«²⁰ and recognized as such by other free individuals, then there is no subjectivity at all since the individual cannot evolve into the self. In order to be the self, an individual has to encounter other selves and establish with them a relation of mutual recognition; its freedom must be recognized and freely respected by others. According to Fichte, intersubjectivity is a necessary condition for the possibility of subjectivity (for the very possibility of selfhood). It is transcendently deduced as such in his *Grundlage* and further developed in the *Wissenschaftslehre novo methodo*.

It is worth noting that although later²¹ Fichte successfully elaborates on some moral and philosophy of right issues, he never discusses intersubjectivity as a condition of society and legal community, though such a view is often assigned to him. This more socially oriented interpretation of intersubjectivity is a distinct mark of Hegel's theory. In Fichte, intersubjectivity indeed plays an essential role; but this role is limited and should not be overestimated. Although the deduction of intersubjectivity is central to Fichte's account of selfhood, conceptually it has little independent significance here. Contrary to Hegel, Fichte does not offer a detailed theory of intersubjectivity. He does not merely choose intersubjectivity as his special topic. Instead, it always serves as a means of his investigation into the notion and conception of selfhood, and as such has a pure instrument-

20 By the time of *The Science of Rights*, Fichte begins using the term »*Aufforderung*« (meaning »requirement«) to focus on the »summoning« aspect more than the »checking« aspect of the conception.

21 See especially Fichte, *The Science of Rights*, trans. by A.E. Krueger, London: Routledge, 1970, especially pp. 57–60. This is where he writes his famous passage, »Man becomes man only among men; and since he can only be man, and would not be at all unless he were man, it follows that if man is to be at all, there must be men. This is not an arbitrary assumption, not an opinion based on past experience or on other probability-reasons; but it is a truth to be strictly deduced from the conception of man.« (*Ibid.*, p. 60).

al character. Very functional as an idea of a necessary condition for the possibility of the self, conceptually it appears as an ingenious intuition or a hint towards something that still has to be explored.

In *Wissenschaftslehre novo methodo*, the notion of intersubjectivity becomes even more functional and more concrete than in the *Grundlage*. The requirement of intersubjective relations is introduced here as a condition for the positing of the absolute freedom of the self. The self recognizes itself to be »summoned« and its absolute freedom to be limited by other free beings that the self encounters in the world. Such a »summons« does not undermine freedom in general. On the contrary, it necessarily assumes and recognizes the ability of the self to act freely; it just requires the self to limit its own freedom out of respect for the freedom of others. Without this mutual respect being reached, the self is not able to posit itself either in a free or arbitrary fashion.

At the same time, however, Fichte points out that the self is essentially to be conceived as *unconditioned* activity; the self is naturally striving to overcome any limits, even those posited by its own facticity, and to determine itself and the world. This demand for its indeterminacy and infinity that allegedly conflicts with the real finity of the self is often interpreted in terms of absolute idealism, and it is mistakenly understood as Fichte's call for the »absolute I«. In reality, this claim reconfirms the infinity of the self and explains how its sheer awareness of itself is possible. The real meaning of the claim is that the self is possible only as a *free* individual I, and as such must posit its freedom *absolutely*, that is pure and unconditional, and not be determined and limited by any empirical fact, including the facticity of its own existence. The only determination of the self is its own internal striving for being itself.

3. Fichte's Account of Selfhood: Analytic Remarks

Beginning with the self as a direct intuition and ending with the self as a necessary idea, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* is an immense description of the development of the selfhood. Fichte shows that the essence of the self lies in the consciousness of itself, in its own awareness of its own existence. Self-consciousness cannot be separated from the self. If the self is to exist, it must be conscious of itself; it simply cannot be the self without being self-conscious. Hence, the very existence of the selfhood lies in the self's

ability to become conscious of itself. Fichte confronts here Cartesian »*co-gito, ergo sum*« and claims that thinking is not the essence of existence, but is instead a specific determination of the latter. For Fichte, the self freely posits its sheer self-awareness as its own ultimate goal, and since the self is only what it determines itself to be, its existence is the constant striving activity of the self towards that goal. The activity of the self coincides with the very being and existence of the self and as such not only assumes the necessary »openness« of the self »to the external influences«, but »pushes« the self into the world and initiates its actual engagement with the latter. This engagement is not of a purely theoretical nature. The world that the self encounters is not just the realm of the material objects, which must be cognized. This is also the realm of the free acting individuals, and as such they ought to be respected. Thus the self is necessarily engaged with the world in both a theoretical and a practical manner.

This engagement, however, is viewed almost entirely from the perspective of the self's own projects. The fundamental orientation of the self towards both realms of the world is one of an autonomous being striving to fulfill the demands which it imposes upon itself. This striving that is directed towards, and takes place in, the world is thus the self-generated activity of the self, but one which is essentially »inward«; it aims not at the actual world, but at the I itself. The I's engagement with the world is just an expression of its freedom and its striving for a sheer self-awareness. The world is instrumental to the I, and its actuality is the realm of actual consciousness.

Yet, despite such an allegedly obscure interpretation of the real world and the I's place in it, Fichte is close to the truth in his attempt to explain how consciousness transcends itself, that is, to uncover a mechanism of how consciousness evolves from what is unconscious. Indeed, in order to be consciousness it must transcend itself, and the point where intuition and reflection, the unconscious and the conscious, meet has to be found not out there, but within the consciousness itself. By making consciousness a world unto itself, Fichte conforms to that idea. However, he cannot explain the transformation from the unconscious to the conscious other than in abstract formalistic terms. Not being able to rationally justify the original act of self-positing of the I, he commands us to commit ourselves to the belief that self-positing is the fundamental operation of which we are intuitively aware in our consciousness. Thus despite his insistence on rejecting Kant's »thing-in-itself« and restating the problem of the relation-

ship that Kant assumed between »appearances« and »thing-in-itself« in strictly subjective terms (namely as a relationship between the conscious and the unconscious), Fichte is not able to completely escape that, and his interpretation of consciousness is necessarily implicating the »thing-in-itself«. Hegel was the first to completely dismiss the very idea of the »thing-in-itself«. He restated the problem of how consciousness transcends itself in terms of the relation of consciousness to its own pre-conscious natural past. This is the relation that consciousness necessarily bears within itself. No investigation into consciousness can hence be complete without investigation into its natural and social history. Furthermore, both investigations must be undertaken at the same time, for the consciousness is what it comes to be through its own historical evolving and development. However unconscious (and perhaps seemingly irrational) its history might be, the latter is a real object of the explicit consciousness. This is the central idea of Hegel's theory of subjectivity, which is in fact a systematic investigation into the history of consciousness in its appearance, first in nature itself and then in the social structures.

As we saw, the Fichtean self is not a mere epistemological subject or a mere moral agent. It is necessarily both, and both are present in essential unity. This unity is guaranteed by the self's striving activity towards a sheer self-determinacy and self-awareness. Self-positing of the I is an actualization of its activity, as actualization that, according to Fichte, should explain consciousness and its ability to transcend itself.

Fichte thus places activity in the center of his philosophy. In the opening lines of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, he describes this activity as that »which does not and cannot appear among the empirical states of our consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of all consciousness and alone makes it possible.«²² The subject thus is no longer defined externally but rather interpreted *from within*, so that the self counts as a substance and cause of all deeds, not just a doer, but activity itself. In Fichte, however, this spontaneous activity is understood as logically prior to the empirical contents of any particular consciousness activity, the one of intellectual self-contemplating. As such, subjectivity is viewed as having an immediate existence that is distinct from empirical states of consciousness. This pure,

22 J. G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 93.

non-empirical ground of particular consciousnesses is called in Fichte »the act of self-positing of the I« and is described as an original, though unobservable, self-relation. Thus, in one sense, Fichte has not entirely given up the Cartesian view of subjectivity. Subjectivity, insofar as it is conceived as an immediate self-relation that is prior to, and the ground of, empirical states of consciousness, has a similar status for Fichte as Descartes' thinking substance in that it is in itself non-empirical yet foundational for empirical consciousness.

Fichte actively elaborates on this issue in both the *Grundlage* and *Wissenschaftslehre novo methodo*. Here he describes the extent to which consciousness determines the theoretical and practical actualization of the self and the world.

According to Fichte, the I originally posits (is conscious or aware of) both itself and its world. The self thus is real insofar as it is conscious of itself and the world that it is engaged with (in Fichte's terminology, the non-self). The self is hence the source of reality, both for itself and for the non-self. Yet the non-self does not have its own independent reality; its reality is conditional upon whether or not it is determined and posited by the self. Such dependence is not of a merely ideal nature and refers not only to an original act of positing. The Fichtean self includes *all* reality within itself. The self does not simply *encounter* the world, but encompasses the whole reality, so there is nothing else beyond that self. This Fichtean idea is often taken along the lines of Kant's great insight that consciousness is already an objective world. Instead, Fichte uses (or perhaps abuses) that ingenious discovery in order to enclose consciousness strictly upon itself. As a result, for Fichte consciousness appears as a circle that is closed into itself, and there is nothing outside of it to be reached. Consciousness is now a world unto itself, a transcendental »thing« which cannot be completely cognized but must be intuitively taken for granted. Thus the Fichtean self is not just logically prior to any empirical content, be that the content of the empirical consciousness or the content of the real world. Being all encompassing, the self is the world itself with all its content. The real meaning of the act of positing for itself both the self and the world, is not in the epistemological investigation into the world and discovery and comprehension of the unknown objects. Instead, this is the thorough inventory of the facts of consciousness, which being originally known must be displayed in their concreteness as the real objects of the world in order to provide material for the self-reflection of the I. The principle that guar-

antees the wholeness of the process is the original unity of self-consciousness, that is the posited self's pattern of existence.

For Fichte the self is primary self-identity, which remains the same from beginning to end. An important consequence for the account of subjectivity is that, striving for self-awareness, Fichte's subject appears fixed, indifferent, and in some way external to the process of its own self-reflection. It itself does not actually evolve through this process, and its content is not really enriched through encounters with the world. Fichte's pure subject, which exists as original self-identity, is lacking a necessary substantive aspect, and as a result is empty of the content and is not capable of development. Indeed, Fichte constructs the pure subject as a substanceless »I think« which faces substance (the »not-I«) externally. The Fichtean subject, like the Cartesian, is identical with itself through the pure and immediate act of thinking, independent of its relation to the »not-I«. Although for Fichte consciousness appears as a unified world, the domains of the I and not-I exist as separate entities, and their alleged synthesis runs into a mere compromise and coexistence rather than into an internal unity of opposition. The latter is the avenue that Hegel explores. The result of the exploration is developing a new concept of subject and subjectivity: subjectivity which necessarily entails a capability of development and eventually of self-consciousness.

A detailed investigation into Hegel's account of subjectivity is beyond the scope of this paper, and I shall leave it for another occasion. Yet, even without considering Hegel's conception of subject and subjectivity it should be clear that Fichte's account of subjectivity is one of the most important approaches to this central topic for 19th century philosophy.

As this paper shows, Fichte's contribution to the theory of subjectivity produces a unique philosophical result that has its own value and significance. In Fichte, subjectivity is understood as a self-presence that is prior to and also necessarily determines our experience as empirically conscious subjects. Here subjectivity is an immediate self-relation that serves as a foundation for both direct and reflective consciousness. This is a finite subjectivity that is originated through the process of its own self-contemplation and as such is a world unto itself.

It is no secret that Fichte's account of subjectivity is more complex and its real content is much richer than it could be introduced and discussed in one paper. It may take hundreds of new investigations to uncover and

adequately reconstruct Fichte's complex concepts and ideas concerning self-presenting subjectivity in all the details. Hopefully that work of tremendous importance will be eventually accomplished and this paper can make a modest contribution to that end.

Schelling's Subversion of Fichtean Monism, 1794–1796

Richard Fincham

(1) The early Schelling's relation with Fichte is a topic about which there is little agreement. It is easy to read Schelling's *On the Possibility of a Universal Form of All Philosophy* of 1794 as exhibiting »discipleship,« just as it is easy to realise that, within later works, this initial idolatry turns into critical ambivalence. It is, however, far less easy to arrive at any decisive conclusion concerning either *when* Schelling's discipleship comes to an end or *what* provokes his change of attitude.

This paper endeavours to shed some light upon these questions. It is suggested that the dissolution of Schelling's initial discipleship can, to a large extent, be explained by considering criticisms of the first exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* found within the writings of Schelling's then friend, Friedrich Hölderlin, and the man who Hölderlin considered his »philosophical mentor,«¹ Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. At all times, Schelling continues to agree with Fichte that Kant's transcendental philosophy must be reconstructed as a monistic system. But, it is argued here, that Schelling becomes increasingly dissatisfied with Fichte's (early) attempts at such a reconstruction insofar as they revoke central tenets of Kant's critical philosophy that, for Schelling, are in no need of revision.

Such an interpretation is suggested by Schelling's assertion within his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* of 1796 that »by itself the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, or contains, the genuine *Wissenschaftslehre*.«² If

1 F. Hölderlin, »Brief Nr. 118« in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), vol. 3, p. 225.

2 F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophisches Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritikismus* in *Werke* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1976ff.), vol. 3, p. 72.

Kant's *Critique* is the genuine *Wissenschaftslehre*, the question emerges as to precisely what status does the Fichtean *Wissenschaftslehre* possess for Schelling in 1796. It is argued here that by 1796 it has become, for Schelling, an illegitimate system, a worthy, but nonetheless flawed attempt to reconstruct Kantian transcendental philosophy as a monistic system, which Schelling no longer wishes to wholeheartedly support.

(2) One contentious feature of Fichte's early expositions of his *Wissenschaftslehre* was the manner in which they remained in the shadow of Reinholdian *Grundsatzphilosophie*.³ In these early expositions Fichte thus seems committed to the claim that the ultimate foundation of a system of transcendental philosophy could be expressed as a *Grundsatz* from which particular principles were synthetically derivable. Fichte thus derives *a priori* truths about experience from propositions expressing that which is *not* an object of experience, namely the transcendental I. This proved controversial insofar as, for more orthodox Kantians, it seemed to propose deriving *facts* from that which can only be *thought*. Immediately after its initial appearance, therefore, many thinkers dismissed Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as an insufficiently critical system. For example, in the early months of 1795, Niethammer writes that »philosophy *cannot* begin *a priori* and instantly synthetically descend from an *a priori* immediately certain proposition, as something in itself unconditioned, to the series of conditions.«⁴ Niethammer thus dismisses Fichte's »absolute first *Grundsatz*« as »a fantasy of the brain« and writes that »in the whole extent of our knowledge [...] no proposition [*Satz*] can be found that has the required apodictic unconditioned certainty to ground upon it [...] a system of our knowledge.«⁵ It seems plausible that these critical reflections influenced Hölderlin. For, as is revealed by the fragment, »Judgement and Being,« whilst Hölderlin agrees with Fichte that the system of knowledge must be grounded by One unitary foundation, he is adamant that this foundation eludes expression within a proposition. *Contra* Fichte, Hölderlin thus de-

3 For a discussion of these issues, see M. Stamm, »Prinzipien und System: Rezeptionsmodelle der Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes 1794« in *Fichte-Studien* 9 (1995).

4 F. I. Niethammer, »Von den Ansprüchen des gemeinen Verstandes an die Philosophie« in *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1969ff.), vol. 1, p. 23.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 44–5.

clares that, rather than expressing the absolutely unitary ground of the system of knowledge, the identical judgement (*Urtheil*) »I am I« is the most fitting example of arche-separation [*Urtheilung*].⁶ Therefore, for both Hölderlin and Niethammer, neither the proposition »I am I« nor, indeed, any proposition can serve as a *Grundsatz* expressing the ultimate foundation of the system of knowledge.

Could it be that Schelling developed an increasingly ambivalent attitude towards Fichte through an awareness of these issues? There is much evidence to support this conclusion, although it remains unclear whether this was due to the influence of Niethammer and Hölderlin or his own independent reflections.

Within *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy*, Schelling proceeds as if he were fully committed to the *Grundsatzphilosophie* initially promulgated by Fichte. For, Schelling claims there that: philosophy is only scientific insofar as its particular propositions are systematically interconnected with a single *Grundsatz*⁷; that the *Grundsatz* of every science cannot itself be conditioned within the science grounded upon it; and that the science of philosophy cannot itself be conditioned by any other science.⁸ So, just like Fichte, Schelling argues that philosophy is the »theory (science) of all science,« which is itself grounded upon »an absolutely unconditioned *Grundsatz*,« which he expresses as »I is I.«⁹ And, like Fichte again, Schelling argues that the philosopher should *begin* with this *Grundsatz* and dismisses the regressive analytic-inductive method employed by Kant.¹⁰

However, Schelling's *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* (written a few months later) exhibits a marked ambivalence towards this aspect of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. There, Schelling maintains that a regressive analytic-inductive method is at least *just as* valid as its opposite. Furthermore,

6 Hölderlin, »Urteil und Sein« in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 502.

7 See Schelling, *Ueber die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt* in *Werke*, vol. 1, p. 269.

8 See *ibid.*, pp. 270–1.

9 See *ibid.*, p. 280. Fichte himself defined the »system« of transcendental philosophy – or »*Wissenschaftslehre*« – as »the science of science as such.« *Fichte's sämtliche Werke* (Berlin: Veit & Co., 1845–6), vol. 1, p. 45.

10 See Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 1, p. 279. Schelling's dismissal of Kant's analytic-inductive method is most probably inspired by Fichte's remarks within his *Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. See *Fichte's sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, p. 57.

whilst Schelling, at one point, seems to paraphrase Fichte, in claiming that the »sheer Being« of the »absolute I« is adequately expressed by the »*Grundsatz* [...] ›I am I,«¹¹ he nevertheless, a few pages later, issues the ambiguous caveat that »of course it would be incomprehensible how the science [of philosophy] could be grounded upon One *Grundsatz*, if one were to suppose that science is, as it were, *encapsulated* [*eingeschachtelt*] within that *Grundsatz*.«¹² Another passage makes it clear that, although Schelling believes that the unitary unconditioned foundation of knowledge can be adequately expressed by the *Grundsatz* »I am I,« he does not believe that the specific dynamics of the manner in which the unconditioned *grounds* the *conditioned* can be rendered fully comprehensible by Fichte's synthetic dialectical argumentation. For whereas Fichte maintained that the fundamental propositions of formal logic are themselves conditioned by more fundamental *Grundsätze* that express the unconditioned foundation of human knowledge, Schelling argues that these very same *Grundsätze* are in fact conditioned by formal logic. For Schelling claims that the *Grundsatz* »I am I« is an identical proposition of *particular content, conditioned by the formal, content-less* proposition, $A = A$.¹³ This is, however, not to say that Schelling claims that formal logic is a science over and above the science of philosophy. It is rather the case that Schelling's »absolute I,« as the unconditioned foundation of all knowledge, conditions the proposition $A = A$, which in turn conditions the *Grundsatz* expressing the »absolute I,« »I am I.«¹⁴ So, whereas Schelling continues to

11 Schelling, *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie in Werke*, vol. 2, p. 103.

12 Ibid., p.113n.

13 » [...] the proposition $A = A$, as a *general formula* (for positing as self-identical), precedes all other formal *Grundsätzen*. Insofar as it is a *particular* proposition – (of particular *content*) – it stands under the general species of absolutely posited propositions, which are conditioned by it insofar as it is a mere formula.« Ibid., p. 148.

14 »All unconditionally posited propositions, that is, all those whose positing is conditioned by the identity of the I [...] can be called *thetical*. Thetical propositions are all those which are conditioned only by being posited in the I, that is, since everything is posited in the I, all those which are *unconditionally posited*. [...] Among thetical propositions, one kind is that of identical propositions. For instance, $A = A$ can be taken as a particular proposition (among those in which subject and predicate are the same, i.e., whose subject has only itself as predicate. Thus I is only I, God only God ...).« Ibid.

claim that the »absolute I« can be expressed by the *Grundsatz*, »I am I,« he nevertheless in some sense disassociates the *Grundsatz* *as such* from its referent. Therefore, even within *Of the I*, Schelling appears critical of Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie*. For, Schelling claims there that Fichte's synthetic derivations are entirely conditioned by formal logic, and thus cannot – as Fichte believes – access an unconditioned sphere that itself conditions formal logic. So, although we are, for Schelling, compelled to postulate an unconditioned foundation grounding all knowledge, formal logic provides an ultimate point, beyond which knowledge cannot reach. Schelling thus returns towards a more orthodox Kantian position, to maintain that the precise reasons *why* we *think* in accordance with certain forms always remains inscrutable.

This critique of Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie* nevertheless remains deeply veiled within *Of the I*. Within 1796, however, when writing a counter-critique of a review of *Of the I*, Schelling is no longer so reluctant to explicitly attack this aspect of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The review was written by Johann Benjamin Erhard, a close friend of Niethammer, who shared his negative assessment of Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie*.¹⁵ Either a reading of Schelling's *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy* or simply the superficial similarities between Schelling's *Of the I* and the *Wissenschaftslehre* had obviously convinced Erhard that Schelling was simply Fichte's disciple. Erhard therefore mistakenly attacks *Of the I* with arguments targeted at the very *Grundsatzphilosophie* to which Schelling's text does not subscribe. Schelling was therefore particularly angry about this misrepresentation of his position, and it is for this reason that the counter-critique contains his most forceful denunciation of Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie*; a denunciation, which ironically largely agrees with the position of the reviewer to whom the counter-critique is directed. For there, Schelling tells us that the purpose of *Of the I* was: »to liberate philosophy from the stagnation into which it had unavoidably to lapse owing to

15 For an insight into the relationship between Erhard and Niethammer and their views concerning Fichte's first exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, see Niethammer, *Korrespondenz mit dem Herbert- und Erhard-Kreis*, W. Baum, ed. (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1995). The content of these letters are discussed within Stamm, »Prinzipien und System: Rezeptionsmodelle der Wissenschaftslehres Fichtes 1794« in *Fichte-Studien* 9 (1995).

ill-fated inquiries *into a first Grundsatz of philosophy*. [The author, i.e., Schelling himself] wanted to prove that true philosophy can start only from free actions, and that abstract *Grundsätze* as the mainstay of this science could lead only to the *death* of all philosophy. The question as to which *Grundsatz* could furnish the starting point for philosophy seemed to him unworthy of a man who feels himself to be free [...]. Since the author considers philosophy as a product of a *free man*, or as *an* act of freedom, he believes that he has a higher conception of it than many a tearful philosopher who thought he had found the lack of unanimity among professors to be the cause of the atrocities of the French Revolution and of all the unhappiness of mankind, and who wanted to remedy this unhappiness with an empty and futile *Grundsatz* in which he imagined philosophy to be encapsulated [*eingeschachtelt*].¹⁶

At the time of writing this counter-critique Schelling was living much closer to Jena in Leipzig and, at that point, cannot have been unaware of the general dissatisfaction with Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie*. At the time of writing *Of the I*, however, Schelling, who was then at the Tübingen seminary, remained distanced from developments in Jena, and therefore may well have adopted this critical stance towards this aspect of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* through his own independent reflections.

(3) Fichte's initial indebtedness to Reinholdian *Grundsatzphilosophie* was not, however, the only feature of his work that proved contentious for its early audience. There was also criticism of Fichte's transformation of Kant's transcendental I into a *sheer activity* that is *immediately* its own object. For this overstepped the central tenet of Kantian criticism that neither the transcendental I nor anything unconditioned could be an object of immediate consciousness and, to some of its initial audience, it therefore seemed that Fichtean transcendental philosophy degenerated into the very kind of uncritical dogmatic metaphysics to which Kant's *Critique* was directed. Such reflections are clearly exhibited within Hölderlin's letter to Hegel of January 26th 1795. For in this letter Hölderlin argues that because any object of immediate consciousness must appear within time, it makes no sense to talk of the I as an activity that intuits itself *as it is in itself*, and thus makes no sense to equate a unitary absolute sphere with I-

16 Schelling, »Antikritik« in *Werke*, vol. 3, pp. 192–3.

consciousness.¹⁷ Hölderlin thus denies that the unitary unconditioned foundation of the system of knowledge can be, as Fichte believed, coherently conceived as invested with I-consciousness. That Schelling was thinking along similar lines is demonstrated by the fact that, soon after receiving this letter from Hölderlin, Hegel received a letter from Schelling that makes almost exactly the same point. For Schelling tells Hegel that »consciousness is not possible without an object. But [...] for the absolute I, there is no object *whatsoever*; for if there were, the absolute I would cease to be absolute.«¹⁸ Schelling thus agrees with Hölderlin that *all* consciousness is essentially intentional in structure, so that self-consciousness cannot occur within the unitary Absolute. Their similar approaches to this issue may well have been inspired by earlier studies of Spinoza at the Tübingen seminary and, in this regard, it is highly suggestive that in these letters they both equate Fichte's »absolute I« with Spinoza's »God.«

Spinoza argues that God cannot possess an »intellect« analogous to our own insofar as God's »thought« cannot, like man's intellect, be posterior to [...] or simultaneous with the objects of understanding.«¹⁹ For, as the unified foundation of all Being, God *qua Natura naturans*, cannot Himself *think* of anything particular. However, in Jacobi's influential work, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*, it is maintained that Spinoza's God is incapable of any *thought* at all. Jacobi thus writes that »because of [His] transcendental *unity* and thoroughgoing absolute infinity [Spinoza's God] can have no object of thought.«²⁰ Such re-

17 »Fichte's [...] *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* [...] will interest you very much. In the beginning I suspected him very much of dogmatism; he appears [...] to have stood very much at the crossroads, or still to stand there – his absolute I (= Spinoza's substance) contains all reality; it is everything, and outside of it there is nothing; hence there is no object [*Objekt*] for this I, for otherwise not all reality would be within it; however, a consciousness without object cannot be thought, and if I myself am this object, then I am as such necessarily limited, even if it were only within time, hence not absolute; therefore within the absolute I I have no consciousness, and insofar as I have no consciousness, I am (for myself) nothing, hence the absolute I is (for me) nothing.« Hölderlin, »Brief Nr. 95« in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 3, p. 176.

18 Letter from Schelling to Hegel, 4th February 1795. Cited in the »Editorischer Bericht« concerning Schelling's *Vom Ich* in Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 2, pp. 24.

19 B. Spinoza, *The Ethics*, S. Shirley, trans., S. Feldman, ed. (Hackett, 1992), p. 45.

20 F. H. Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* in *Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998ff.), vol. 1,1., p. 19.

flections were clearly important for Hölderlin, who, in some notes on Spinoza composed in the Tübingen seminary, reproduces this quotation practically word for word.²¹ Hölderlin thus interprets Spinoza as maintaining that the dichotomous structure of intentionality contradicts the absolutely unitary foundation of a philosophical system. In this respect, we can see how, for Hölderlin, Kant's conception that I-consciousness is essentially characterised by *thought's* self-reflection, and that such self-reflection has an intentional structure, in no way contradicts the teachings of Spinoza. Furthermore, the fact that his own reading of Spinoza was almost certainly influenced by Jacobi (and possibly Hölderlin also) may explain why Schelling also sees things in this way. So, this may explain why both Hölderlin and Schelling negatively react to Fichte's investment of the Absolute with I-consciousness. So, whilst they agree with Fichte that Kantian transcendental philosophy must be reconciled with some kind of Spinozistic monism, they are undoubtedly dissatisfied with the way that Fichte's reconciliation subverts Kantianism by claiming that I-consciousness is originally non-intentional and subverts Spinozism by investing the Absolute with I-consciousness. As far as both Hölderlin and Schelling are concerned, however, it is possible for such a reconciliation to remain true to the doctrines of both Kant and Spinoza by maintaining that I-consciousness is characterised by a dichotomous intentional structure, grounded by an Absolute that is itself devoid of consciousness.

Schelling's *Of the I* can indeed be read as the bare outline of a philosophical system that synthesises the thought of Kant and Spinoza without subverting their central tenets. For it describes how any consciousness *at all* can only occur within the »empirical« sphere in which subject and object reciprocally condition one another.²² The »absolute I,« which Schelling postulates as underlying this sphere, is thus conceived as neither possessing consciousness nor as something which can become an object of con-

21 »The cause of the world is neither understanding nor will. For will and understanding do not occur *without an object*. And *no object* occurs as a result of the transcendental *unity* and absolute infinity of the first cause. And it is incoherent to produce a concept prior to its object, to have a determinate will before there is something to which it could relate itself.« Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 492.

22 See Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 2, pp. 88–9.

sciousness.²³ However, for Schelling, my consciousness of myself as I re-establishes the unity of the Absolute within the multifarious empirical sphere. *Contra* Fichte, I-consciousness is not an expression of freedom, but rather »an unfree urge,«²⁴ insofar as it is an action to which the »empirical subject« is compelled by the »absolute I.«²⁵ Furthermore, echoing Kant's arguments within the »Transcendental Deduction,« Schelling describes how it is the conscious subject's »striving« to re-establish the unity of the »absolute I« that conditions our objective experience.²⁶ The conscious subject »unifies« a manifold of disparate representations to constitute objective experience and, in so doing, it recognises its reflection within that unified objective experience to produce I-consciousness, and it is precisely by means of such I-consciousness that the unity of the »absolute I« is said to be re-established. So, although, for Schelling, the »absolute I« is *itself* in no way invested with I-consciousness, it is only through the assumption of an »absolute I« that both the »unity« of our objective experience and our unity of consciousness are conceivable.²⁷ So, whilst the relation that Kant identifies between I-consciousness and objective experience is, for Schelling, only conceivable through the assumption of a Fichtean »absolute I,« he nevertheless succeeds in showing how Kantian transcendental

23 See *ibid.*, p. 90.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

25 Within *Of the I*, Schelling describes the apperceptive I-subject as the »empirical I« insofar as he believes that the appellation »empirical« should be applied to anything within the *conditioned* subject-object sphere. He thus tells us that »the word *empirical* is usually taken in a much too narrow sense. Empirical is everything that is in contrast to the pure I, everything essentially related to a not-I, even the original positing of any contrast [*Entgegensetzen*] as posited in some not-I, a positing which is an act that has its source in the I itself, the very act by which any contrasting becomes possible. *Pure* is what exists without relation to objects. *Experienced* is what is possible only *through* objects. *A priori* is what is possible only *in relation* to objects but not *through* them. *Empirical* is that *through which* objects are possible.« *Ibid.*, p. 100n.

26 »My empirical I is subject to change, but in order to retain its identity in that change it strives to elevate the objects which change it, to a *unity* – (categories) – and thus, through the identity of its *striving*, it establishes the identity of its *existence* [*Daseins*] as a permanent principle of representations in the change of time.« *Ibid.*, p. 135.

27 »If there were no absolute I, one could not comprehend how a not-I could produce a logical I, a unity of thinking.« *Ibid.*

philosophy can be granted a monistic foundation without overstepping its central tenets.

It is also possible to read Hölderlin's »Judgement and Being« as the programmatic sketch of a philosophical system that likewise synthesises the thought of Kant and Spinoza without overstepping their central tenets. For there Hölderlin also maintains that *all* consciousness is only conceivable within the sphere in which a divided subject and object are reciprocally related, whilst also maintaining that the division between subject and object necessarily presupposes an absolute unity that cannot be conceived as invested with I-consciousness.²⁸ However, Hölderlin differs from Schelling insofar as he argues that we cannot justifiably describe the Absolute as an »I.« So, Hölderlin could not support Schelling's claims that I-consciousness is the product of a fractured »absolute I« striving to re-unite itself. Indeed, in a later text, »On the Operations of the Poetic Spirit,« Hölderlin seems to provide a critique of such a conception insofar as he reflects upon a position that conceives of the I »as an oppositable unity [*entgegensetzbares Einiges*],«²⁹ that is, an original unity that fractures itself into an I-subject and I-object. For Hölderlin, such a position declares the opposition of I-subject and I-object to be »a deception or contingency that [the I] produces for itself, in order to know its identity,« and is objectionable insofar as it follows that the I *as such* is not actually conscious of *itself* at all.³⁰ Hölderlin therefore claims that, whilst I-consciousness necessarily presupposes a unitary Absolute, it cannot be legitimately described as an »I« and that it is in fact not wholly subjective at all. In »Judgement and Being,« it is thus described as »Being proper [*Sein schlechthin*].«³¹

This argument against the early Schellingian claim that the I is an »opposable unity« follows from Hölderlin's position in »Judgement and Being« and it is therefore quite likely that Hölderlin was in possession of this

28 »If I say: I am I, the subject (I) and the object (I) are not united in such a way that no separation could be performed without violating the essence of what is to be separated; on the contrary, the I is only possible by means of this separation of the I from the I. How can I say: I! without self-consciousness? Yet how is self-consciousness possible: In opposing myself to myself, separating myself from myself, yet in recognising myself as the same in the opposed regardless of the separation.« Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 503.

29 Ibid., p. 538.

30 Ibid., p. 540n.

31 Ibid., p. 502.

argument in 1795. If this were the case, then Hölderlin would have had the opportunity to confront Schelling with such an argument, to endeavour to convince him to adopt a conception of the Absolute nearer his own.

(4) Although the ambivalence Schelling exhibits towards Fichte's monism in *Of the I* parallels many of Hölderlin's contemporaneous reflections on these issues, it seems unlikely that this concordance was the product of mutual influence. When considering Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, however, there need be no hesitation concerning whether Hölderlin could have influenced the position taken in that work. For in June 1795 Hölderlin left Jena for Nürtingen near Tübingen and met Schelling on at least two occasions for philosophical discussion, as is documented within letters Hölderlin sent Niethammer, in which he speaks approvingly of Schelling's »new convictions« and intimates that they should meet with Niethammer's approval.³² There is, however, little agreement concerning the precise nature of these »new convictions« that Hölderlin refers to.³³ However, it is possible that Hölderlin is referring to a turn within Schelling's work that he himself is responsible for influencing. For within the *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling, like Hölderlin, clearly no longer believes that the »Absolute as such« is exhausted by the purely subjective spontaneity of thought and freedom.

The »criticism« and »dogmatism« evoked within the title of that work refer to positions that conceive the Absolute as, respectively, either an »absolute subject« or an »absolute object.« This distinction seems to refer to the contrast between Schelling's own position in *Of the I* on the one hand and Spinoza's monism on the other. A second distinction is drawn between »a critique of our cognitive faculties« and »dogmaticism [*Dogmaticismus*],« a distinction which clearly refers to Kant's critical philosophy on the one hand, and the uncritical metaphysical positions to which it is directed on the other. Kantian criticism and dogmaticism are, for Schelling, two different approaches to »theoretical philosophy,« and thus

32 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 225.

33 For two alternative interpretations see: D. Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin*, E. Förster, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 114–6 and A. Pieper's »Editorischer Bericht« concerning Schelling's *Philosophisches Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritikismus* in Schelling, *Werke* vol. 3, pp. 27–9.

concern knowledge of empirical reality. In contrast, »criticism« and »dogmatism« describe philosophical systems which enter the sphere of »practical philosophy« in order to *postulate* something regarding a unitary Absolute underlying empirical reality. These distinctions are designed to establish the result that, whilst it may refute dogmatism, Kantian criticism is not inconsistent with Spinoza's monism. That is, although it must declare it to be theoretically indemonstrable, Kantian criticism cannot refute the claim that the Absolute is an »absolute object« insofar as it has no validity outside the sphere of the »fact of experience.«

Schelling argues that the conflict between criticism and dogmatism arises because philosophy *begins* within the empirical sphere, in which subject and object are divided, so that any *ascent* beyond this sphere seems to require that we privilege one of the two sides of this divide. In this way, Schelling provides an argument against Fichte that entirely agrees with Niethammer's reflections. For whilst Niethammer argued that philosophy cannot *begin* from anything other than the »fact of experience,« Schelling denies here that the assertion that the Absolute is purely subjective can be based upon something that we know with more certainty than the »fact of experience.« We can therefore see that, in the space of a mere eighteen months, Schelling has totally changed his position: In *On the Possibility of a Universal Form of Philosophy* he argued, like Fichte, that philosophy should begin with the unconditioned and descend to the conditioned; in *Of the I*, this movement was declared to be just as valid as its opposite; but, in the *Philosophical Letters*, he argues that such a movement is illegitimate.

As in *Of the I*, Schelling argues that an ascent beyond the »fact of experience« is necessary insofar as Kant's philosophy has shown that theoretical knowledge, experience and self-consciousness are only possible on the assumption of a prior absolute unity, which Kant himself did not investigate. But, because this unitary Absolute grounds the possibility of theoretical knowledge, it cannot itself be an object of theoretical knowledge. Because it claims that the generation of the »fact of consciousness« is »graspable« as an object of theoretical knowledge, Fichte's early *Wissenschaftslehre* thus becomes viewed by Schelling as an invalid or inconsistent system. This criticism is clearly implicit within Schelling's claim that, insofar as it provides the »science« of all theoretical knowledge, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is the *genuine Wissenschaftslehre*: »The *Critique of Pure Reason* [...] is valid for all systems, while every system bears the stamp of individuality on the

face of it, because no system can be completed otherwise than *practically* [...] . The more closely a philosophy approaches its system, the less it can claim universal validity [*Allgemeingültigkeit*].

By itself the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, or contains, the genuine *Wissenschaftslehre* because it is valid for all science. Nevertheless, science may rise to an absolute principle [*Prinzip*] and it *must* do so if it is to become a *system*. But the *Wissenschaftslehre* cannot possibly establish One absolute principle in order to become a *system* (in the narrower sense of the word). It must contain, not an absolute principle, not a definite and consummate system, but the canon for all principles and systems.³⁴ There are three ways in which this passage exhibits a deep ambivalence towards Fichte's early *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Firstly, the strict relation between the concepts of »science« and »system,« established by Reinhold and taken over by Fichte, falls apart here. For Schelling, »science« and »system« are no longer interchangeable terms, and he himself returns to a Kantian conception of »science« whilst continuing to embrace a Fichtean conception of systematicity. For Schelling at this time, a science is a consistent body of theoretical knowledge-claims and, insofar as Kant's *Critique* provides a consistent body of knowledge-claims regarding the conditions of possibility of *all* theoretical knowledge, it provides a »science of science,« and is thus fully entitled to the name *Wissenschaftslehre*. Yet, *this* »science of science« still necessarily presupposes a unitary foundation, and it is assertions concerning this Absolute which produce a »system.«

Secondly, Schelling no longer believes that assertions regarding the Absolute can expect universal assent. Whilst, for Reinhold and Fichte, the assertion of the foundation of their systems was supposed to adduce universal acceptance, for Schelling, the foundation of a system is merely a practical *postulate* that cannot adduce such assent.

Thirdly, whilst Schelling continues to agree with Fichte that Kant's philosophy is insufficiently systematic, he denies that any assertions attempting to »systematise« it can themselves constitute knowledge-claims.

34 Schelling, *Philosophisches Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus* in *Werke*, vol. 3, p. 72.

He thus tells us that: »no system [...] is, in its consummation, an object of knowledge.«³⁵

Whether we embrace either criticism or dogmatism depends upon the type of human beings we are. He who »feels« himself to be autonomous will embrace criticism, whereas, he who does not will embrace dogmatism.³⁶ The former conceives of the Absolute as subjective, whereas the latter conceives of it as objective. The highest good, which the former strives to realise, will be the elimination of the opposing »other,« whereas the highest good, for the latter, will be passivity in the face of the other. Paradoxically, however, Schelling reveals that such ethical efforts are in fact striving for the same condition. For if an »absolute subject« were realised, it would no longer be a subject, so that *my* reality as a conscious subject would vanish within an infinite, not wholly subjective, reality.³⁷ Thus, Schelling shows that whereas criticism and dogmatism may be perfectly consistent systems, there is only One Absolute to which both systems attempt to ascend. Criticism will assert that it is an »absolute subject,« whereas dogmatism will assert that it is an »absolute object,« but it is in fact neither. It is rather an »absolute unity« in which subjectivity and objectivity are absolutely identical.³⁸ Within the *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling therefore, for the first time, thinks that the Absolute may not be completely reducible to the subjective spontaneity of thought and freedom.³⁹ Here, as he will do in later work, he thus thinks of it as analogous to

35 Ibid.

36 See *ibid.*, p. 75.

37 »[If] every object is lost for me, and therewith also the consciousness of myself as subject [then] *my* reality vanishes in the infinite reality. [...] I cannot do away with the object without also doing away with the subject *as such*.« *Ibid.*, p.97.

38 »If *both* systems [criticism and dogmatism] strive for the perfecting of human knowledge by one absolute principle, this must be the point of agreement between both systems. For if all controversy ceases in the Absolute, the controversy between different systems must cease in it too, rather all systems must terminate in it; they must vanish in it *as* contradictory systems.« *Ibid.*, p.99.

39 »He who has reflected upon freedom and necessity has found for himself that these two principles must be *united* in the Absolute: *freedom*, because the Absolute acts by unconditioned autonomy and *necessity*, because it acts only according to the laws of its own being, the inner necessity of its essence. In the Absolute there is no longer any will that could have reality independently of those acts. Absolute freedom and necessity are identical.« *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Hölderlin's »Being proper,« as an identity of the spontaneity that constitutes subjectivity and the productivity that constitutes objectivity.

(5) Between 1794 and 1796 Schelling's work thus moves from an initial appropriation of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* towards a deep-seated ambivalence towards Fichte, inspired by a far more orthodox Kantianism. Schelling is attracted to Fichte's monism insofar as he believes that the many syntheses Kant outlined in accounting for the possibility of knowledge are only comprehensible insofar as we presuppose an *original* unity that Kant did not investigate. But, between 1794 and 1796, Schelling gradually rejects all of the distinctive features of the monism Fichte adopted within his first expositions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. For, Schelling rejects the notion that the monistic foundation can be adequately grasped as a *Grundsatz*, he rejects the investment of this foundation with I-consciousness and, eventually, even rejects the notion that this foundation is purely subjective. In this regard, Schelling's complex appropriation and critique of Fichte's writings within these early years sow the seeds of the mature Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* insofar as, within that work, Schelling systematically explains how both the »fact of experience« and the fact of our self-consciousness necessarily presuppose an Absolute that is not *wholly* subjective.

Intellectual Intuition: Reconsidering Continuity in Kant, Fichte, and Schelling

Yolanda Estes

Fichte on Kant and Intellectual Intuition: »Kant too had such an intuition, but he did not reflect upon it. Indeed his entire philosophy is a product of this intuition; for he maintains that necessary representations are products of the acting of a rational being and are not passively received. But this is something that he could only have come to realize by means of intuition. Kant recognizes that self-consciousness occurs, i.e. a consciousness of the act of intuiting within time. How could he have arrived at such a recognition? Only by means of an intuition – and such an intuition is certainly intellectual.«¹

¹ Abbreviations:

FTP = *Fichte: Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000);

GA = *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Reinhard Lauth, Hans Gliwitzky, and Erich Fuchs (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964ff.);

GS = Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königliche preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin, 1910 ff.);

IWL = *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994);

KPV = Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*;

KRV = Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*;

SE = *System of Ethics*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005);

STI = Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978);

1. Introduction: The Continuity Thesis

In this chapter, I reconsider continuity in Kant's, Fichte's, and Schelling's concepts of intellectual intuition. Moltke S. Gram's influential essay, »Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis,« discredited the continuity thesis, or the contention that Kant's, Fichte's and Schelling's discussions of intellectual intuition hinged on a single question about the relation between the intellect and things-in-themselves.² Proponents of the continuity thesis believed that Fichte and Schelling affirmed the same concept of intellectual intuition denied by Kant. Gram argued that the continuity thesis was false insofar as no unitary problem of intellectual intuition existed in either Kant's philosophy or German idealism.

I wish to examine Kant's, Fichte's, and Schelling's concepts of intellectual intuition in light of Gram's essay. I would not resurrect the continuity thesis but rather would draw attention to four issues. First, Gram examined only three of the five forms of intellectual intuition considered by

UHK = Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794–1796)*, ed. and trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980);

W = Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart/Augsberg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61);

WLnm K = *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (»Krause Nachschrift, »1798/99).

FTP, p. 115 (WLnm K 31–2). Note also: »Kant rejected intellectual intuition, but he defined the concept of intuition in such a way that intuitions could only be sensible; and therefore he said that these sensible intuitions cannot be intellectual. [Ibid.] Note also: [Intellectual intuition] is directed toward an acting – and this is something that Kant does not even mention (except perhaps under the name »pure apperception«). Nevertheless, it is still possible to indicate the exact place within Kant's system where he should have discussed this. For Kant would certainly maintain that we are conscious of the Categorical Imperative, would he not? What sort of consciousness is this? Kant neglected to pose this question to himself, for nowhere did he discuss the foundation of *all* philosophy. Instead in the Critique of Pure Reason he dealt only with theoretical philosophy, within the context of which the Categorical Imperative could not appear. And in the Critique of Practical Reason he dealt only with practical philosophy and discussed only the content of this sort of consciousness, and thus the question concerning the very nature of this sort of consciousness could not arise within the content of the Second Critique. [IWL, p. 56 (GA, I, 4: 225)]

- 2 »Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis,« *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (1981), pp. 287–304 [Henceforth = »Intellectual Intuition«].

Kant. Second, he treated the concept of intellectual intuition in Fichte's philosophy as unitary when Fichte used »intellectual intuition« to refer to four distinct acts or concepts. Third, he understated similarities between Schelling's, Fichte's, and Kant's concepts of intellectual intuition. Fourth and finally, although Gram's essay was an invaluable contribution to the contemporary understanding of intellectual intuition, contemporary scholars should acknowledge both discontinuity and continuity within the tradition of German idealism.

2. Overview of Gram's Argument and Contribution

In »Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis,« Gram contends that intellectual intuition concerned Kant, Fichte, and Schelling for different reasons. Kant addressed the relations between the conditions of knowing and objects whereas Fichte considered the knowing subject's relation to itself and Schelling dealt with cognition of the subjective-objective identity present in phenomena. Kant wanted to show the legitimate application of the conditions necessary for experience to objects and thus, reserved »intellectual intuition« to designate illegitimate application of the categories to objects. Fichte aimed to distinguish between our manner of knowing objects and our mode of acquaintance with the necessary subjective activities that condition experience. Schelling meant to deny the distinction between the conditions of experience and the objects of experience.

According to Gram, Kant rejected three logically independent versions of intellectual intuition: 1) the intuition of the noumenon in the positive sense, 2) the creative intuition of an archetypal intellect, and 3) the intuition of the totality of nature.³ In the *Transcendental Analytic*, Kant defined intellectual intuition as a mode of intuition whereby an intellect knows things-in-themselves. He rejected this version of intellectual intuition because space and time are *a priori* forms of human sensibility and not objective properties of things. In the *Inaugural Dissertation*, Kant discussed an archetypal intellect that creates its objects in the act of cognition, but he rejected this form of intellectual intuition as a possible mode of cognition for our ectypal intellects because it violates the distinction between con-

3 »Intellectual Intuition,« pp. 289–295.

cepts and things. He also considered a form of intellectual intuition that grasps the sum of all phenomena as a whole, which he rejected because it conflicts with the spatio-temporal organization of intuition.

Gram asserts that Fichte implemented none of the concepts of intellectual intuition rejected by Kant but rather a form of intellectual intuition that collapses the distinction between concepts and objects on which Kant's formulations depend.⁴ Fichtean intellectual intuition involved immediate consciousness of the self's own activity. Because all conceptual awareness involves self-awareness, this intellectual intuition would be non-conceptual. Accordingly, Gram claims that Fichtean intellectual intuition collapsed the distinction between phenomena and noumena insofar as the self-aware subject of this intuition is also the intuited object of awareness and thus, is neither phenomenon nor noumenon. Since Fichte denied any legitimate role for the concept of the thing-in-itself, he also denied any possible knowledge of the thing-in-itself. Likewise, the self-intuition occurs in time and thus, involves no consciousness of things-in-themselves. Moreover, the unity intuited in this act is not a totality of phenomena but an ideal self that »ought but cannot« be produced by us.

Gram argues that the young Schelling's concept of intellectual intuition appears to corroborate the continuity thesis but that the mature Schelling adopted neither Kant's »multiple interpretations« nor Fichte's »single-minded interpretation« of intellectual intuition.⁵ Schelling described intellectual intuition as an insight into nature as a realm of Ideas or archetypes that exist apart from self-consciousness. Although he made only metaphorical allusions to the relation between the archetypal and the phenomenal worlds, he regarded intellectual intuition as knowledge of the subjective-objective identity that underpins experience. This absolute knowledge involves no insight into the self or its activities. Likewise, it does not concern knowledge of things-in-themselves, because its object resides within phenomena. Moreover, it presumes no acquaintance with the totality of phenomena but rather with the archetypes present in individual phenomena.

Gram's invaluable discussion of the continuity thesis rescued Kant, Fichte, and Schelling from an odious myth. Nonetheless, he disregarded

4 »Intellectual Intuition,« p. 300.

5 »Intellectual Intuition,« p. 300. See W, I: 81, 366, 369, 392, 401, and 420.

some significant parallels in Kant's, Fichte's, and Schelling's philosophies. Despite noteworthy differences in their concepts of intellectual intuition, and even more important differences in their interpretation of transcendental philosophy and its boundaries, Kant's legacy is clearly recognizable in Fichte's and Schelling's philosophies and in their interpretations of intellectual intuition.

Recent Fichte scholarship has demonstrated that several types of intellectual intuition play complex roles in Fichte's philosophy. Three decades have passed since Dieter Henrich proposed the developmental thesis to counter the reflection model of self-consciousness and to reconcile the seeming inconsistencies in Fichte's discussion of intellectual intuition.⁶ Other scholars, such as Alexis Philonenko, Claude Piché, Jürgen Stolzenberg, and Xavier Tilliette, have recognized that Henrich's developmental interpretation fails to account for Fichte's use of the term intellectual intuition during any developmental period of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. More recently, Alain Perrinjaquet's discussion of the relation between real and philosophical intellectual intuition has shown that Fichte's concept of intellectual intuition is not unitary in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*; and Daniel Breazeale has provided solid evidence that Fichte employs no less than four different forms of intellectual intuition in the later Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁷

3. Kant and Intellectual Intuition

Kant discussed the possibility of five types of intellectual intuition: 1) the intuition of the noumenon in the positive sense, 2) the creative intuition of an archetypal intellect 3) the intuition of the totality of nature 4) the apprehension of the I's self-activity, and 5) the conjoined intuitions of the

6 »Fichte's Original Insight,« trans. David R. Lachterman, pp. 15–53 in *Contemporary German Philosophy*, Vol. I (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1982).

7 Alain Perrinjaquet, »«Wirkliche» und »philosophische» Anschauung: Formen der intellektuellen Anschauung in Fichtes *System der Sittenlehre* (1798),« *Fichte-Studien* 5: *Theoretische Vernunft* (1993), pp. 57–81; Daniel Breazeale, »Fichte's *Nova Methodo Phenomenologica*: On the methodological role of »intellectual intuition« in the later Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*« *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4 (1988), pp. 587–616.

moral law and freedom. Although Gram ignored and Kant rejected the last two types of intellectual intuition, Fichte accepted both.

As intellects, we are conscious of the power to combine what is given and intuited according to the relations of inner sense. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claims that it follows the self must be more than mere appearance, but we can know it solely as appearance and not as it exists in itself or might be given through a non-sensible intuition, because our sensibility admits no intellectual intuition.⁸ Kant notes that we would not need to presuppose a relation to something external in accounting for experience if we could connect a determination of our existence with consciousness of the self through an intellectual intuition.⁹

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says that the »I think« expresses the act of determining one's own existence, but the manifold pertaining to one's existence is not given in the »I think.« He claims that if the manifold were given by the self's activity, then the corresponding intuition would be intellectual. Although self-intuition is necessary for the manifold to be given, time, as the pure form of intuition, conditions self-intuition. Accordingly, Kant argues we cannot become conscious of ourselves as self-active or self-determining.¹⁰

Only by means of an original spontaneity does the self count as an intellect and thus, we must represent this activity in order to view ourselves as intellects. Nonetheless, we cannot directly grasp, or intellectually intuit, our self-determining activity. The original synthetic unity of apperception yields self-consciousness, but this consciousness entails no knowledge, which requires the determination of the object according to the form of inner intuition.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant calls our awareness of the moral law a fact of reason, because we have no preceding awareness of

8 KRV B 159.

9 KRV Bxl.a.

10 »Now since I do not have another self-intuition that gives the *determining* in me (I am conscious only of the spontaneity of it) prior to the act of determination, as time does in the case of the determinable, I cannot determine my existence as that of a self-active being; all that I can do is represent to myself the spontaneity of my thought, that is of the determination and my existence is still only determinable sensibly, that is, as existence of an appearance.« [*Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 169 (KRV B 158)].

freedom and because what it compels is not based on experience. He argues that if we were given immediate consciousness of freedom of the will, the moral law would be an analytic proposition, but since this immediate consciousness would require an intellectual intuition, which we do not possess, freedom cannot be presupposed. Thus, the moral law is simply the undeniable, and indeed, the »sole fact of pure reason.«¹¹

4. Fichte and Intellectual Intuition

In the *Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte uses intellectual intuition in reference to four distinct ideas: 1) the real intellectual intuition, 2) the concept of pure I-hood, 3) the philosophical self-reflection, and 4) the methodological inner intuition.¹²

Fichte's term real intellectual intuition refers to an immediate non-sensible awareness of freedom obtained through moral activity. In grasping the moral law, the moral subject becomes conscious of itself as a willing subject with a moral obligation. The immediate coincidence of self-awareness and moral awareness involves a self-reverting activity. Consciousness of the ethical law enjoins an act of self-determination and thus, is itself a determinate self-reverting activity.¹³

Fichte claims that real intellectual intuition is conditioned by a summons to act freely, or an *Aufforderung*, which is directed from one indi-

11 »The consciousness of this fundamental law may be called a fact of reason, since one cannot ferret it out from antecedent data of reason, such as the consciousness of freedom (for that is not antecedently given), and since it forces itself upon us as a synthetic proposition a priori based on no pure or empirical intuition. It would be analytic if the freedom of the will were presupposed, but for this, as a positive concept, an intellectual intuition would be needed, and here we cannot assume it. In order to regard this law without any misinterpretation as given, one must note that it is not an empirical fact but the sole fact of pure reason, which by it proclaims itself as an originating law.« [*Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing), p. 31–2 (KPV 31–2)].

12 Alain Perrinjaquet referred to the first form as real intellectual intuition and to the second and third collectively as philosophical intellectual intuition. Daniel Breazeale provided an analysis of the fourth form, the more obscure, inner intuition.

13 SS, GA, I, 5: 147 (SE, p. 139–140).

vidual to another in empirical experience.¹⁴ A feeling of absolute »ought« gives rise to moral self-awareness, or intellectual intuition, wherein the empirical subject recognizes itself as subordinate to the Categorical Imperative and thus, views itself in light of its capacity to act freely rather than in light of its empirically determined nature. Real intellectual intuition is an actual fact of empirical consciousness whereby the empirical subject obtains a concept of itself as a pure will.¹⁵

Fichte says that intellectual intuition as pure I-hood, which the transcendental philosopher presupposes as the immediate consciousness underpinning all mediate consciousness, is the concept of pure self-reverting activity. The philosophical concept of I-hood refers to a being whose essence consists in self-activity. The philosopher infers this concept and postulates it as the ground of consciousness. As the ground of consciousness, it is never an object of the philosopher's direct awareness. The philosophical intellectual intuition, or *Tathandlung*, never enters in empirical consciousness as a fact, because it is simply the structure of spontaneous pure self-consciousness, or I-hood. Pure I-hood is thus an Idea employed hypothetically in order to prevent the theoretical account of consciousness from falling into circularity.¹⁶

According to Fichte, intellectual intuition as philosophical self-reflection is an explicit awareness of self-reverting activity obtained by the transcendental philosopher who abstracts from the objective world, constructs the concept of the »I,« and recognizes that this task involves a self-reverting activity. This self-reverting activity involves an immediate coincidence of self-awareness and thinking activity. When the philosophizing subject

14 WLnM K, pp. 241–42 (FTP, p. 469).

15 »It is only through the medium of the ethical law that I catch a glimpse of myself and insofar as I view myself through this medium, I necessarily view myself as self-active. In this way an entirely alien ingredient, viz., my consciousness of my own real efficacy, arises for me within a consciousness that otherwise would be nothing but a consciousness of a particular sequence of my representations.« [IWL, p. 49 (GA, I, 4: 219)]

16 »Pure willing at this point is not supposed to be anything other than an explanatory ground of consciousness; it is still a hypothesis, *not yet* an object of consciousness. {One should think of this determinacy of pure willing in the most indeterminate manner possible – as a mere hypothesis, as a *qualitas occulta*; or however else one may wish – since it does not appear within consciousness at all.}« [FTP, pp. 293–4 (WLnM, K, p. 144; GA, IV: 2, pp. 235–6 9)]

thinks of himself, he engages in self-reverting or self-determining activity, which is itself the concept of the I.¹⁷

The self-awareness revealed in philosophical self-reflection is implicit in empirical consciousness. It becomes a fact of consciousness for the transcendental philosopher, who subjects the simple act of self-reflection to a higher act of reflection. In other words, in order to think of oneself, one must first think of something else and then, wrench oneself there from, which requires a free self-reverting activity. Consequently, philosophical self-reflection involves a real act – a *Tathandlung* – resembling, but not identical to, the pure I presupposed as grounding consciousness. Likewise, philosophical self-reflection involves an intuition, resembling, but not identical to, the real intellectual intuition of moral consciousness.

In the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, Fichte presents inner intuition, which he also calls intellectual intuition, as a method of philosophizing.¹⁸ Inner intuition requires that the philosopher observe carefully both aspects of philosophical self-reflection: the concept of the I and the act of attending to the construction of that concept. The I is asserted in the act of self-reflection as self-positing and thus, the philosopher observes the generation of all the other acts necessary for the I to posit itself as self-positing. In this manner, the philosopher »intuits« the transcendental conditions that constitute the synthetic structure of consciousness, including the *Tathandlung* grounding the philosophical self-reflection.¹⁹

5. Schelling and Intellectual Intuition

Schelling's frenetic development complicates the question of intellectual intuition in his philosophy. His use of intellectual intuition seems to alter with each new work. Moreover, one struggles to describe the role of

17 WLnM K, p. 98 (FTP, p. 110).

18 WLnM K, p. 21, 31–35 (FTP, p. 100, 113–20).

19 »We must possess some knowledge of this ultimate ground, for we are able to talk about it. We obtain this knowledge though immediate intuition, and in turn, we immediately intuit our immediate intuition itself. I. e. we have an intuition of an intuition. Pure intuition of the I as subject-object is therefore possible. Since pure intuition of this sort contains no sensible content, the proper name for it is »intellectual intuition.« [FTP, pp. 113–114 (WLnM K p. 31)]

Schellingian intuition within any single text.²⁰ Nonetheless, Schelling often provides two formulations of intellectual intuition: the philosophical intuition of the I and the creative intuition of an archetypal intellect.

In *On the I as Principle of Philosophy* (1795) and *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795), Schelling describes intellectual intuition as an immediate awareness of the unity of the subject and object in self-consciousness.²¹ This freely produced intuition expresses the logical principle of identity that the transcendental philosopher uses as the first principle of philosophy.²² Schelling claims that this subjective intuition of the self exists alongside an objective intuition of the world, which results from a psychological deception whereby the materialist, or dogmatist, projects a prior self-intuition onto the world. Both the subjective and objective intuitions involve a transition from conscious activity to unconscious repose, which reflection breaks by reintroducing the distinction between subject and object present in ordinary consciousness. Although Schelling describes intellectual intuition as a form of philosophical consciousness, he suggested that other mental states, such as aesthetic consciousness, mimic intellectual intuition.

In the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling retains the philosophical intuition as a freely postulated ground of idealism. Although he allows that intellectual intuition involves a subjective awareness, he also emphasizes that intellectual intuition includes an unconscious activity. So, intellectual intuition comes to denote the unity of subjective, conscious awareness (or cognition) and objective, unconscious activity (or constitution).

Schelling's postulated unity of cognition and constitution lead to the introduction of intellectual intuition as archetypal knowing, or creative intuition.²³ Creative intuition involves the simultaneous cognition and con-

20 Difficult as this task may be, Michael Vater does an excellent job of fulfilling it in his introductions to Peter Heath's translation of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* [STI] and to his own translation of Schelling's *Bruno or On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things*, trans. and ed. Michael G. Vater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984) [Henceforth = *Bruno*].

21 UHK, pp. 181–184, 216, 285, 317–319.

22 Here, Schelling follows Fichte's early philosophy as expressed in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794).

23 STI, p. 200.

stitution of its objects apart from sensible intuition, empirical consciousness, and philosophical reflection. Creative intuition, or absolute knowing, grasps the archetypes within determinate natural phenomena as well as the teleological determination of the parts of nature through the whole. Nonetheless, transcendental philosophy cannot articulate absolute unity cognitively but must rely on art to express it symbolically and on philosophy of nature to express it teleologically. In *Bruno or On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things* (1802), Schelling revokes his claim that art serves as the ultimate philosophical organon. However, he offers no discursive account of absolute knowing but rather positive metaphorical descriptions and negative logical descriptions of the absolute.

In *On the I as Principle of Philosophy* (1795) and *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795), Schelling associates intellectual intuition with freedom. Nonetheless, he claims that real intuition of the moral law is a subjective principle that falls within the realm of appearances. In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, he argues that freedom is realized in history through an unconscious teleological principle.²⁴ The very notion of moral striving towards an ideal entails a divided self, which he rejects. So, in *Bruno*, he claims that a self that contains a subjective-objective dichotomy is a relative self, because absolute self-hood requires the indifference of subject and object.²⁵

Conclusion: Reconsidering Continuity in Kant's, Fichte's, and Schelling's Concepts of Intellectual Intuition

Intellectual intuition is one aspect of Kant's legacy that Fichte and Schelling engaged in their unique interpretations of transcendental idealism. Fichte and Schelling considered concepts of intellectual intuition arising within Kant's discussion of the limits of knowledge. Specifically, Kant, Fichte, and Schelling addressed the possibility of a philosophical intuition of the I and of a real intuition of the moral law. Although they disagreed about intellectual intuition, each employed it to define the borders of transcendental philosophy.

For Kant, the limits of knowledge were inseparable from the definition of intuition and the notion of the thing-in-itself. Kant's ambiguity about

24 STI, p. 191 and 200.

25 *Bruno*, p. 68.

things-in-themselves, forced him to deny intellectual intuition. Were intellectual intuitions permitted, things-in-themselves could be objects of intuitions. By defining all intuition as sensible, he precluded both things-in-themselves as objects of knowledge and intellectual intuitions as modes of consciousness. As a result, Kant struggled to describe self-consciousness and moral consciousness. Allowing them as intellectual intuitions would violate the limits of knowledge he imposed but denying them rendered the knowledge he desired impossible.

Insofar as Fichte rejected the very notion of a thing-in-itself as meaningless, Fichtean intellectual intuition involves no consciousness of things-in-themselves. Moreover, since consciousness delimits its own »circle from which we cannot escape,« the boundary of knowledge is not bound to the definition of intuition. When modes of consciousness arose that involved an immediate, non-sensible awareness rather than an immediate, sensible awareness, Fichte called them intellectual intuitions. Nonetheless, intellectual intuition still served to limit his philosophy. The philosophical concept of the I, is a hypothesis or postulate, which the philosopher makes explicit as a philosophical reflection and which, the moral subject realizes as a real intuition of freedom. The real intuition provides an extra-philosophical ground beyond which the philosopher is not permitted to go. So, Fichtean intellectual intuition binds objective knowledge to empirical consciousness.

Schelling employed the philosophical intellectual intuition as a first principle in his early philosophy. Initially, he viewed the philosophical concept of the I in much the same manner as Fichte, but he discovered this principle would not yield a system that satisfied his philosophical goals. As Schelling moved toward monism, he sought a foundation that united the subjective intellectual intuition of the I with an objective intellectual intuition of the world. Moreover, unlike Kant and Fichte, he was not primarily concerned with accounting for consciousness, so he searched for a principle that encompassed conscious awareness and unconscious activity. In his early writings, Schelling associated intellectual intuition with freedom, but individual consciousness of moral freedom was clearly not of paramount importance even in his early works. Indeed, he found the Kantian/Fichtean idea of freedom too confining as a basis for the historical development of man as a species. Ultimately, Schelling abandoned Fichtean intellectual intuition because he rejected the limits it imposed on philosophy; but in attempting to transcend self-consciousness

and moral consciousness, he could not express his knowledge claims discursively.

Schelling used the concept of intellectual intuition to violate the very boundaries set by Kant and Fichte – boundaries that Kant first determined and that Fichte later reinforced by means of the concept. This »betrayal« does not imply that intellectual intuition contains the destruction of transcendental idealism but rather that Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, starting with related concepts of intellectual intuition, moved toward very different interpretations of idealism and its limits, which compelled them to re-define intellectual intuition in different ways.

From Idealism to Romanticism and Leibniz' Logic

George Seidel

Those familiar with Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794 are familiar with the problem he encounters at the end of the Second Fundamental Principle. Fichte has two absolutes, an absolute self ($I = I$) and an absolute non-self (non- I is not I), each absolutely opposed to the other. In the case of two absolutely (opposed) absolutes, one, or both, must go. It would, of course, be possible to sacrifice the absolutely posited non-self. However, solipsism has never been an attractive option for philosophers. The view that there is only mind and states of mind cannot really be successfully argued, since there would be no »other« with whom to argue it. As we know, Fichte resolves the issue by what he terms an Experiment. *Experimentum* is a late Latin word meaning, simply, experience. The self's experience of itself and of the non-self is that both are finite. Thus Fichte's Third Fundamental Principle: the self posits itself as finite, and op-poses to itself a finite non-self. Fichte's solution is to finitize the absolute self and non-self, thereby solving the problem of two absolutely opposed absolutes. Later on, he will resurrect the First Fundamental Principle in the form of an absolute or ideal self as the goal of all striving. This is, after all, idealism.

In the period of his *Naturphilosophie* (1795–1799), Friedrich Schelling also wrestles with the problem of the two absolutes. However, he does not propose the Fichtean solution of finitizing the two opposed absolutes of self and non-self. Rather, with an able assist from Spinoza, Schelling insists that two absolutes absolutely identical with the same (absolute) identity must be identical with each other. In his *Ethics* (Pt. I, prop. 5), Spinoza had argued that there cannot exist two or more substances (for example, God and/or Nature) having the same nature or attribute, above all if that attribute is absoluteness or infinity. This means that there can be only one sub-

stance (*Deus sive Natura*). Thus, in his 1801 *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, Schelling maintains that there is only one Absolute.

It should not be imagined that this move on Schelling's part is an easy one. It takes him nearly six years (1795–1801) to work through it and work it out. During this period he is also in the process of distancing himself from Fichte's thought. For example, he is convinced that Fichte's view of nature as merely the material for moral duty is insufficient. On the other hand, he is equally unwilling to go the full Spinozistic route and identify God and Nature. He does not wish his philosophy accounted »Spinozist,« which in the jargon of the period was tantamount to being classified an atheist.

At issue, philosophically, is the meaning of the principle of identity. Spinoza takes a strict understanding of the principle. Behind Schelling, as well as Fichte, there lies an essentially weakened version of identity, namely Leibniz' Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. The principle passes, largely unscathed, through Kant, who insists that while Leibniz' principle is valid for objects of the pure understanding (for example, the concept of a cubic foot of space) or concepts in general, in virtue of the external sense of space there is difference, not identity. As far as Kant is concerned, Leibniz confuses phenomena with things-in-themselves. Schelling agrees. In his *Concerning the Ego as the Principle of Philosophy* (1795), he says that Leibniz saw the principle of identity as a principle of objective reality, not, as with the »critical philosophy,« deriving from the positing of the ego's reality. Hence, Schelling terms Leibniz a dogmatist.¹ Leibniz' principle is, for Kant, not a law of nature, but only an analytic rule for the comparison of things through mere concepts. Still, although he would accept Leibniz' principle when it comes to concepts, Kant would undoubtedly have had difficulty applying it to a »totality« such as the absolute (KrV A 263, B 319; A 271, B 327 ff.; A 281, B 337).

Historians of German Idealism often fail to appreciate the importance of Leibniz for the development of German philosophy, above all for German idealism. Richard Kroner's *From Kant to Hegel* devotes only a couple

1 *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie oder über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen*, Schellings Werke, Schröter, ed., München: Beck, 1958, I, 154. Special thanks are due to J. and K. Byron for kindly reading over the typescript and making corrections and helpful suggestions for its improvement.

of pages to Leibniz.² Wilhelm Dilthey devotes more space to Frederick the Great than to Leibniz.³ And in his *Philosophy of German Idealism*, Nicolai Hartmann scarcely mentions Leibniz.⁴ The earlier standard view is that true German thought begins with Kant. It is often forgotten that when Kant criticizes the philosophy of the schools he is not referring to medieval scholastics, or to their followers, but to the Leibnizians, such as Christian Wolff and A. G. Baumgarten. It is, in large measure, against these that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is directed. But as with any critique, Hegel will insist, what is criticized also includes what has been accepted by the critic, since only thus does he or she know what to critique and how to go about doing it. So, while Kant may reject metaphysical monads and the empirical application of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, he accepts Leibniz' weakened version of the principle of identity. Indeed, I would argue that it is this weakened version of identity that renders German Idealism possible.

Obviously, the principle of identity remains strong in Descartes and Spinoza, although the seeds for its weakening are present already in Descartes' *Cogito*.

This is obviously implicit in Leibniz' term »in-discernible,« since a subject, a discerner, would be required to note the lack of a discernible difference between two substances, even if it should be the case that the difference might be discerned only by God. For Descartes the $A = A$ of identity, along with the eternal verities of mathematics, would have a truth independent of the human mind, likely also the divine mind. For Fichte, on the other hand, although he begins the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* with the principle of identity ($A = A$) in a strict form, he discovers that its basis is in an absolutely posited $I = I$. However, since this absolute self is later discovered to have been posited through the activity of the synthesizing finite self, it becomes clear that the principle of identity has its basis, in its thereby implicitly weakened form, within the finite self. It may be noted that this point becomes important for the development of the axiomatic method in mathematics later on in the nineteenth century. Schelling, on the other

2 *Von Kant bis Hegel*, 2 ed., Tübingen: Mohr, 1961, pp. 37–40.

3 *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes, Gesammelte Schriften*, 3 ed., vol. III, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1962.

4 *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus*, 2 ed., Berlin: de Gruyter, 1960.

hand, has the $A = A$ principle grounded in the absolute self.⁵ In keeping with this there will also be mathematicians later in the century who will view numbers as Platonically real.

When it comes to the possible joining of the absolute self with the absolute non-self of nature, on the one hand, Schelling recognizes that it is not possible to put two absolutes next to each other; they cannot be synthesized. Also, if the self is posited prior to the non-self, then it can be posited in no synthesis as absolute. Schelling is thoroughly aware of the problem of putting the self and the non-self together from the Kantian perspective. Already in the *Concerning the Ego as Principle of Philosophy* (1795), Schelling notes that it is not possible to join a free ego with a necessitated nature.⁶ Thus, many of Schelling's works between 1795 and 1800 are devoted to a reworking of the philosophy of nature. (I must confess that I have never closely studied Schelling's philosophy of nature. Indeed, I am not fully convinced that it is something worth doing. Life is too short.) What Schelling must do is bring about the switch from a mechanistic (Newtonian) understanding of nature – which is essentially also Spinoza's – to an organismic one. It is understandable why it takes him so long – this is no easy task. Kant makes the same attempt in his *Critique of Judgment*, with, according to some critics, only modest success. In his effort to bring about the switch, Schelling plays Fichte and Spinoza off against each other, while incorporating elements from each into his own thought. He cannot accomplish this with Fichte alone, since for Fichte the non-self of nature is but the material for one's moral duty. Neither can he do it with Spinoza alone, since Spinoza remains essentially a mechanist. So transcendental subjectivity gets transferred to the absolute objectivity of nature, and nature as object gets united with the subject. As he says in his 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, the absolute ideal is also the absolute real (*das absolut-Ideale auch das absolut-Reale sey*).⁷ The subjective and the objective are conjoined in a pure identity (*reine Identität*) through the absolute.⁸ There is a sort of pre-established harmony, he says, between the two. Indeed, early in this work Schelling indicates his appreciation of Leib-

5 Schellings Werke, I, 102.

6 Schellings Werke, I, 163.

7 Schellings Werke, I, 708.

8 Schellings Werke, I, 712.

niz, while, at the same time, insisting that Leibniz' identification of nature with the world of ideas does not quite do the trick.⁹

According to Leibniz' formulation of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles (*Discourse on Metaphysics* IX), there cannot be two substances that are entirely alike, differing only numerically (*solo numero*);¹⁰ for one can be substituted for the other without changing the truth of the proposition (*salva veritate*).¹¹ In other words, if no significant difference between two beings can be found, or if both have precisely the same set of properties, they must be the same thing. Or as Leibniz notes in the *Monadology* #9, any two beings in nature will never be precisely one like the other; always an internal difference, or some intrinsically basic character, will be found.¹²

Now one would certainly be inclined to say, with Fichte, that there is a decided difference between the two absolutes of self and non-self. They are, after all, opposites. There would clearly seem to be an »internal difference,« an intrinsically different character, between the two. Indeed, as Leibniz put the matter in the heat of the controversy with Samuel Clarke, »I infer from the principle [of the identity of indiscernibles], among other

9 Schellings Werke, I, 719.

10 » [...] qu'il n'est pas vray que deux substances se ressemblent entierement, et soyent differentes *solo numero* [...] « G. W. Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, C. J. Gerhardt, ed., Hildesheim: Olms, 1965, IV, 433. On the principle that Nothing is Without Reason or Cause, »Sequitur etiam hinc *non dari posse <in natura> duas res singulares solo numero differentes.*« *Opuscles et fragments inédits de Leibniz*, L. Couturat, ed., Hildesheim: Olms, 1966, p. 519. Never are there to be experienced (*reperientur*) two eggs or two leaves or blades of grass in a garden that are perfectly similar to each other.

11 »Eadem seu *coincidentia* sunt quorum alterutrum ubilibet potest substitui alteri salva veritate.« *Die philosophischen Schriften*, VII, 236. In G. H. R. Parkinson's view the identity of indiscernibles principle obtains in virtue of his *Praedicatum inest subjecto* principle, namely that no two substances can have the same complete concept; a reason why they are diverse would have to be given, otherwise it would violate the »grand principle« of sufficient reason (*Nihil est sine ratione*). *Logic and Reality in Leibniz's Metaphysics*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1965, pp. 129 ff.

12 »Car il n'y a jamais dans la nature deux Etres, qui soyent parfaitement l'un comme l'autre, et où il ne soit possible de trouver une difference interne, ou fondée sur une denomination intrinseque.« *Die philosophischen Schriften*, VI, 608.

consequences, that there are not in nature two real absolute beings, indiscernible from each other .« (Fifth Paper #21).¹³

In his *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800, on the other hand, Schelling speaks of the $A = A$ of identity as being not, as in Kant, analytic or the basis for analytic statements, but as also having a synthetic meaning, that is, if one A would be op-posed to the other A . Thus must one substitute (*substituieren* – the same word Leibniz uses) a concept in the place of A , which expresses an original doubleness in the identity, and vice versa; as there is also doubleness in the original identity.¹⁴ If this be the case, then the infinite self in its possible infinite becoming (*unendliches Werden*) and the infinite non-self must be united.¹⁵ For if the objective ego is absolute and its op-posed negation is absolute as well, and if it is not possible to unite the two as divisible – since they are infinite [contra Fichte] – as through a third something (for both opposites are the result of the positing activity of one and the same self), then [the absolute] object and subject must be identical.¹⁶

By 1801, with his *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, Schelling has arrived where he wishes to get. He agrees with Kant that the $A = A$ principle of identity has no relation to the empirical, its truth only in an absolute sphere. Still, knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) is necessarily implicated therein.¹⁷ In other words, we are dealing with identity in its post-Cartesian, and modified Kantian, sense. Thus can Schelling conclude: the absolutely posited self and the absolutely posited non-self identical with the same identity must be identical with each other in that absolute identity.¹⁸ There is, then, no quantitative difference between subject and object but, rather, an indifference between the two.¹⁹

What is the meaning of this »indifference« in Schelling? It is not the strict identification of the *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, the af-

13 *Die philosophischen Schriften*, VII, 393–394. He goes on to add that this supposition of two indiscernibles, such as two pieces of matter entirely alike, might be possible in abstract terms but is hardly consistent with the order of things.

14 *Schellings Werke*, II, 372–373.

15 *Schellings Werke*, II 383.

16 *Schellings Werke*, II, 394.

17 *Schellings Werke*, III, 13, 18.

18 *Schellings Werke*, III, 17.

19 *Schellings Werke*, III, 20.

firming and the affirmed, of Spinoza; much less is it the self and non-self joined in a finitized op-position to each other, as in Fichte. The »in« in Schelling's in-difference, is, I think, the Greek privative alpha. There is not a strict identity between the ideal and the real, the subject and the object, the self and the non-self – Schelling is not Spinoza – on the other hand, neither is there the difference of op-position between the two, even a relativized difference – as in Fichte – rather, in accordance with the Leibnizian version of identity, there is a *lack* of difference between the two. This in-difference preserves both sameness and difference. It is in this way that Schelling is able to open the door to the romantic view of nature, indeed to a sacral view of nature. It also renders possible Schelling's romantic aesthetics. There is both sameness and difference in the imaging of the infinite in the finite by the Creator, and as it occurs in the creativity of the artist.²⁰

Human activity, for Fichte, preserves the same elements of sameness and difference. There is the sameness of the identity that is the finite self, albeit a developing and changing identity. There is also the difference between the finite self and the finite non-self. But there is sameness and difference relative to the finite self and its infinite or ideal self as well. The self that I am and the self that I am to be, the self I should be – Fichte's *Sollen* – are not opposed each to the other, because my ideal self is genuinely mine, since I posit it. Still, they are different, since the finite self has not yet achieved its ideal. Indeed, it never will. Hence the infinite striving.

Schelling draws a different »logical« conclusion. According to Leibniz, in the case of any two substances some internal difference, or »intrinsic denomination,« other than purely numerical, will always be found. Fichte obviously thinks that there is such an »internal difference« between self and non-self; and thus he chooses to finitize both, in keeping with human »experience.« Schelling, on the other hand, argues that if both self and non-self are *absolutes*, then there is really no internal difference between the two. Indeed, one of Leibniz' formulations of the principle, namely that in nature there cannot be two real absolute beings indiscernible from each other, would seem to favor Schelling's identification of the absolute of self and the absolute of nature, the ideal and the real, the subjective and the

20 Cf. G. J. Seidel, »Creativity in the Aesthetics of Schelling,« *Idealistic Studies*, 4 (1974) 170–180.

objective, into one. Two absolutes, having the same attribute, namely that of absoluteness, must be identical with each other.

In terms of Leibniz' principle one can go either way. One can, of course, say that in Leibniz' *Discourse on Metaphysics* IX and in the *Monadology* #9 there is, in one case, a logical understanding of the principle while, in the other, an ontological or metaphysical one. However, in a rationalist philosophy, such as that of Leibniz, it is difficult to determine how a distinction between the logical and the ontological can successfully be drawn. Indeed, one could argue that the so-called logical and/or ontological meaning of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles in Leibniz is subject to the very same identity of indiscernibles principle.

Nevertheless, it may be the case that the principle functions differently with »relatives« than it does with »absolutes,« as is evidenced in the very different conclusions drawn by Fichte and Schelling. One can understand how Schelling could term the *Wissenschaftslehre* a relative, rather than an absolute, idealism.²¹ The basis for the very different conclusions drawn by Fichte and Schelling can also found in Leibniz. In the *New Essays on Human Understanding* Bk. II, Ch. 17, Leibniz insists that there is a difference between an absolute in relation to space (the immensity of God) and the notion of absolute space (an infinite whole) composed of parts.²² For Leibniz, after all, God would be a being infinitely simple, that is, not composed of parts; whereas space, for him, is a relation, a *rapport* between substances, in which space there would obviously be parts.²³

In order for German idealism to work, the principle of identity must indeed be weakened from the strict form it still retains in Spinoza. One can see this early on in the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* when Fichte says, »Every opposite is like its opponent in one respect, = X; and every like is opposed to its like in one respect, = X. Such a respect, = X, is called the

21 *Schellings Werke*, I, 718.

22 *Die philosophischen Schriften*, V, 145.

23 Also, it should be noted that, with Huygens, Leibniz is a »wavist,« not an atomist (like Newton). This means that for him two »things,« for example, two waves, can occupy the same place at the same time. As he says in the *Nouveaux essais*, »For instance, we find that two shadows or two rays of light interpenetrate [...] Yet we can still distinguish one ray from the other just by the direction of their paths, even when they intersect,« *New Essays on Human Understanding*, P. Remnant and J. Bennett, trs., Cambridge: University Press, 1981, p. 230. Cf. *Die philosophischen Schriften*, V, 213.

ground, in the first case of *conjunction*, and in the second *distinction*: for to liken or compare opposites is to *conjoin* them; and to set like things in opposition is to *distinguish* them.²⁴ In other words, there is no distinction without a prior unity; no unity without a prior difference. In short, sameness necessarily implies difference; difference necessarily implies sameness.

Such difference, as well as sameness, are also contained in Schelling's notion of in-difference, as noted above.

In Hegel, the principle of identity has been so thoroughly weakened that it is scarcely recognizable as a principle. Thus, in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel refers to $A = A$ as an empty tautology. The identity that is identical with itself is an identity that implies difference, since anyone who would assert that identity is difference is saying that identity is different from difference. The truth of identity necessarily implies difference.²⁵ In his dialectical moves from identity to difference to diversity (which is the indifference of difference), diversity contains both like and unlike. Things are the same only if they are different (like), different only if they are the same (unlike).²⁶ And although Hegel may poke fun at the application of Leibniz' principle with the example of ladies at court spending their time searching the leaves of trees in the forest to see if any two could be found alike,²⁷ Hegel is clearly not averse to employing Leibniz' principle of the identity of indiscernibles for his own purposes. Indeed, the *Science of Logic* opens with the dialectic of pure being and pure nothing, which are said to be the same (*dasselbe* – notice, he does not say *das Gleiche*, identical), since it is not possible to distinguish a pure being that is indeterminate immediacy, contentless, qualityless, indistinguishable from anything else, from a pure nothing, which is complete emptiness, undifferentiatedness, and lacking in all determination (nothing). Still, this sameness is not without difference, otherwise the dialectical resolution into becoming would not be possible.²⁸

Hegel both does and does not accept Schelling's identification of the two absolutes. He does, after all, accept something of Schelling's sacral

24 Fichte: *Science of Knowledge*, P. Heath and J. Lachs, trs., New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970, p. 110.

25 Hegel's *Science of Logic*, A. V. Miller, tr., London: Allen & Unwin, 1969, p. 417.

26 Hegel's *Science of Logic*, pp. 417 ff.

27 Hegel's *Science of Logic*, p. 422.

28 Hegel's *Science of Logic*, p. 82.

view of nature; nature is estranged spirit; as he also accepts portions of Schelling's aesthetics. However, he does not accept the undifferentiated dissolving of all individuality in the absolute, everything dissolved in the ocean of the Absolute, a night in which all cows are black. On the other hand, neither will he accept Fichte's positing of the absolute or ideal self at an infinite and unattainable distance from the finite self; this is a bad or negative infinity. So is Hegel, or is Hegel not, a romantic? Is Hegel, or is Hegel not, an idealist? And the answer to both questions, in accordance with the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, is, in both cases, yes.

Fichte's Transcendental Logic of 1812 – Between Kant and Hegel*

Angelica Nuzzo

Traditional formal logic plays an instrumental role in carrying forth the revolutionary task of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Indeed, Kant's first critical work does not discard this ancient discipline but uses it for a new purpose. Transcendental philosophy is a critical investigation not only of traditional metaphysics but of traditional logic as well. Formal logic does not simply yield to transcendental logic – just as the mere form of thinking (*Denken*) does not simply yield to content-determined knowledge (*Erkennen*). But what is precisely the *distinction* and what the *relation* between formal and transcendental logic in the first *Critique*, and what is exactly *transcendental* logic for Kant?¹ These questions occupy a central position in the development of logic in the first two decades of the 19th

* Research on this essay was supported by the CUNY Research Foundation. Abbreviations and editions used: I. Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Hrsg. v. Der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, 1910 ff. (=AA); I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (=KrV), followed by the pagination of A and B editions; J.G. Fichte, *Fichtes Werke*, ed. by I.H. Fichte, Bde. 1–8, Nachdruck Berlin, DeGruyter, 1971 (=SW); J.G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. by R. Lauth, Stuttgart, Frommann, 1962 ff. (=GA); Hegel, G.W.F., *Werke in zwanzig Bände*, (=TW), ed. by E. Moldenhauer, H.M. Michel, Frankfurt a.M., Surhkamp, 1986.

1 See the studies by T. Pinder, »Kants Begriff der Logik,« in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 61, 1979, 308–336; B. Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge. Sensibility and Discursivity in the Critique of Pure Reason*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998; G. Tonelli, »Kant's Critique of Pure Reason within the Tradition of Modern Logic,« in: *Akten des 4. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, 1974, Teil III, Berlin/NY, 189; H. Wagner, »Zu Kants Auffassung bezüglich des Verhältnisses zwischen Formal- und Transzendentallogik,« in: *Kant Studien*, 68, 1977, 74ff. ■

century. Their answer, however, is differently determined by another set of issues arising from the different appropriation of the context in which Kant's distinction between general and transcendental logic is drawn.

In his 1812 reflections on the relation between general and transcendental logic (or, as he puts it, »on the relation of logic to philosophy«), Fichte notices with regret that, after all, Kant has not much despised general or common logic – at least, he observes, not as much as he should have. He has not »destroyed it completely from its foundations, as his philosophy would have required« him to do (SW IX, 112). Clearly, for Fichte, general logic should not have played such a prominent role for Kant's transcendental logic. At this point of his philosophical development, however, Fichte's most urgent task is no longer to complete the »revolution« that Kant only began, nor is it to give Kant's transcendental propedeutic the definitive form of a system.² These issues, current at the end of the 18th century, had already inspired Fichte's polemic against Bardili's *Grundriß der ersten Logik* (Stuttgart, 1799) – his reaction against Bardili's attempt at replacing metaphysics with a new »speculative« type of logic.³ And it is in the framework of the discussion on Kant's philosophy at the turn of the century, that one must place the systematic of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in 1794 (*Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*). In these years, logic is a purely formal discipline that »must be deduced« from the WL by way of the free act of abstraction from its entire content. No place is recognized to transcendental logic either within or without the WL.

In 1812 Fichte's philosophical objectives have changed and, with them, his relation to Kant. The old confrontation with Kant's transcendental philosophy is taken up within a new conception of philosophy. What is then Fichte's aim in investigating the »relationship of logic to philosophy or transcendental logic« – and even in expanding his lectures at the University of Berlin to cover this new topic?⁴ Is such a meditation needed precisely *because* Kant has *not* completely destroyed traditional logic with the

2 See KrV B25/A11.

3 See Fichte's review of Bardili in the *Erlangen Literatur-Zeitung*, Oct. 1800, GA I, 6, 429–450. See Lauth, »Eine Bezugnahme Fichtes auf Hegels »Wissenschaft der Logik« im Sommer 1812,« in: *Kant Studien*, 89, 1998, 456–464, 458.

4 The current topic on which one used to lecture in the university *curriculum* was *Logik und Metaphysik* not »Transcendental Logic.«

consequence that his own transcendental logic is not, in a sense, transcendental enough?

In this essay, I contrast the idea of transcendental logic that Fichte proposes in his 1812 lectures »On the relation of logic to philosophy« to Kant's transcendental logic. I claim that Fichte's transcendental logic arises out of a particular interpretation of the charge of »empiricism« that is often invoked against Kant at the beginning of the 19th century.⁵ Ultimately, Fichte places Kant's transcendental logic on the same ground as general logic. Paradoxically, Fichte reads Kant's alleged empiricism contextually to the pre-critical metaphysical stance of Kant's *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*. Fichte's transcendental logic is the attempt to overcome both positions – at the same time endorsing them both. In my analysis, I draw to the center Fichte's notion of Being (*Sein*), which I explain on the background of both Kant's critical theory of sensibility and of his pre-critical notion of an ultimate foundation of all thinking (and being). The opposition between *Sein* and *Bild* with which Fichte first institutes transcendental logic in its transcendental character leads me to parallel the opening of Fichte's 1812 logic to the opening of the first volume of Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* published in the same year. What I pursue with this comparison, however, is not a historical question of influence.⁶ What interests me instead is, first, the way in which post-Kantian logic owes its inspiration to some interpretation or modification of Kant's transcendental philosophy. Second, I want to explore the question of whether the idea of including the concept of *Sein* in logic – and even, more pointedly, of *beginning* logic with it (the position shared by Hegel and Fichte) – could be brought back to a peculiar modification of Kant's idea of transcendental logic.

5 See, in relation to Hegel's critique of Kant, A. Nuzzo, »Sinnliche und übersinnliche Erkenntnis: das Problem des Empirismus in Hegels Glauben und Wissen,« in: *Wissen und Begründung. Die Skeptizismus-Debatte um 1800 im Kontext neuzeitlicher Wissenskonzeptionen*, ed. K. Vieweg, B. Bowman, Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann, 2003, 75–92.

6 See R. Lauth, »Eine Bezugnahme Fichtes auf Hegels »Wissenschaft der Logik,« cit.

1. Kant: the Presupposition of Sein

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, transcendental logic as second division of the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements follows an even more revolutionary discipline entitled »transcendental aesthetic.«⁷ Transcendental logic is part of a theory of knowledge whereby is related not only to *Denken* and its abstract forms but to *Erkenntnis* and its a priori principles; it builds on the separation between intuition, concept, and reason, and appeals to the distinctions between form and content, and empirical and pure cognition. On the basis of the cognitive value distinctively proper to transcendental logic, Kant denies to general logic the function of »organon of the sciences«⁸. Since general logic, in dealing exclusively with forms of thinking, has no relation to contents or objects,⁹ it cannot be »organon« as this presupposes previous knowledge of the object whose cognition must be established according to the general rules of logic. On the other hand, however, transcendental philosophy is also denied the systematic status of organon and considered propedeutic to the system. General logic does not address the issue of the »origin of our knowledge.« It is neutral with regard to the distinction between »empirical and pure thinking«¹⁰ as well as with regard to the type of objects to which our thinking is directed.¹¹ Transcendental logic, on the contrary, is a logic that investigates a »particular« use of the understanding. In Kant's presentation, this use is initially derived, by a sort of hypothetical analogy, from the distinction between pure and empirical intuition introduced in the Transcendental Aesthetic. Transcendental logic is logic of a peculiar type of cognition of a peculiar set of objects. It is »the science of our intellectual and rational knowledge through which we think of objects entirely a priori;« its forms are concepts whose origin is a priori; and yet those concepts are characterized by a rela-

7 Transcendental Aesthetic notably takes the place of Baumgarten's proposal of a sister-discipline to logic, namely, *aesthetica* as *gnoseologia inferior*: see A. Nuzzo, »Kant and Herder on Baumgarten *Aesthetica*,« in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44, 4, 2006, 577–597; *Ideal Embodiment. Kant's Theory of Sensibility*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008 (chapter 1–3).

8 Kant, *Logik*, AA IX, 13.

9 KrV B79/A55.

10 KrV B80/A55.

11 KrV B78/A54.

tion to objects, which is not due to sensibility, i.e., intuition (either empirical or pure) but to the »acts (*Handlungen*) of thought itself.«¹²

Thus, transcendental logic investigates the a priori relation of concepts to objective contents; this relation accounts for the distinction between empirical and pure cognition ignored by general logic. Unlike formal logic, transcendental logic does deal with *contents*. But where does the content come from? With this question post-Kantian readers repeatedly press the Kantian text. In the framework of the first *Critique*, the idea of transcendental logic ›presupposes‹¹³ the transcendental aesthetic – thinking ›presupposes‹ sensibility. Accordingly, argues the post-Kantian reader,¹⁴ the content of transcendental logic is presupposed as object materially given to sense perception, formally structured by pure sensible intuition, and only successively brought to the a priori synthesis of knowledge. Herein lies the charge of Kant's »empiricism.« It is the claim that Kant's construction rests on the presupposition of a given empirical manifold – an original material *Faktizität* that cannot be explored by transcendental logic as it lies outside of it. This original, factual givenness parallels Kant's assumption of a *Ding an sich* impenetrable to knowledge. Both ›facts‹ define the limits of Kant's transcendental logic – respectively, its lower and upper limit. Ultimately, the dependence on a presupposed content meant to define transcendental logic in opposition to general logic, threatens to erase the difference between them. For both seem to require a previous acquaintance with the object in order to generate meaning.

2. Fichte: Transcendental and Common Logic

A particular version of these objections to the doctrine of the first *Critique* is the starting point of Fichte's 1812 lectures *On the Relation of Logic to Philosophy or Transcendental Logic*. Here Fichte reflects on the ancient

12 KrV B81/A57.

13 The meaning of this ›presupposition‹ or *Voraussetzung* is precisely part of the meaning of the empiricism-charge raised against Kant.

14 Thereby I am stylizing (and certainly simplifying) the objection raised against Kant. A more detailed account of Hegel's position is to be found in A. Nuzzo, »Sinnliche und übersinnliche Erkenntnis,« while Fichte's position is discussed in the next section.

problem of logic as »organon« of philosophy. He critically appraises general logic in order to »make room for the different view of thought which is proper to transcendental logic.« He takes the issue of the organon of philosophy in a literal sense. At stake is the mental – and physical – «organ» that allows us to do philosophy (SW IX, 131). On the function of this organ depends the *transcendental* character of logic. Fichte claims the »same opponent« as Kant, namely, formal or common logic. However, while Kant ultimately »spared his enemy« and went only as far as lining up his forces against it, Fichte decidedly aims at eliminating the enemy once and for all.¹⁵ Fichte accepts the starting point and principal aim of Kant's *Critique*, which he indicates in the question of »whether thinking is creative (*schöpferisch*) and itself produces its object« (SW IX, 108). For Fichte, Kant's transcendental logic is as dependent on a presupposed content as formal logic is. In both cases, thought hides behind the illusion of creativity; but its activity is truly subordinate to the presupposed, merely empirical factuality of Being (*Sein*).

Fichte presents formal logic as the position in which »the I of the logician refuses to be satisfied with a world of particular bodies; the logician aims at a manifold of higher rank, at an order of genera, classes, species, and subspecies« (SW IX, 116). Logic abstracts from empirical reality and pretends that its concepts are »created out of nothing« (SW IX, 118). Employing the *Critique of Judgment's* notion of formal purposiveness, Fichte dismantles common logic's pretension of independency from given *data*. He argues that the success of the logician's construction of the abstract world of general classifications »depends on the bodily world« to which concepts must eventually refer. Logic's enterprise ultimately hinges upon the sheer empirical fact of whether »such genera, species, and subspecies are actually given« or not. But whether this purposive accordance that decides of the meaningfulness of formal concepts can indeed be established, is, Fichte contends using the terminology of the third *Critique*, only a »*Gunst der Natur*« – maybe just a »lucky chance« (SW IX, 116). To be sure, even the view of nature that Kant attributes to reflective judgment hardly removes logic's dependence on a presupposed factuality. The idea that nature's organization must be thought *as if* it »were so constituted as to allow its manifold to be connected into a universal« concept (SW IX, 117)

15 See also SW IX, 130f.

and this, in turn, allowed one to step up to higher abstractions, simply underscores, for Fichte, Kant's ultimate appeal to empirical reality.

Fichte's argument goes a step further. Formal logic's abstract concepts presuppose the cognitive meaningfulness of the material that they claim to conceptualize. Repeating Kant's view of the formality of general logic, Fichte attacks the circular argument according to which the logical »comprehension of an individual being« through its conceptual notes requires one to actually carry through all those conceptual operations on the basis of which that individual being can indeed become object of logical analysis. Thus, logical thinking presupposes not only empirical givenness but also the *Dasein* of thinking itself. »The possibility of producing a concept presupposes its *Dasein*; the entire sphere of determinate thought *is there before* the thought that ought to be explained, hence: is already there precisely in the way in which it will *then* be produced; thereby the logician has not explained anything« (SW IX, 119). Fichte concludes that logic presupposes *Sein* – both empirical factual existence and thought's own existence. Concepts are not created; they are simply posited once they have been presupposed. This applies both to general logic and to Kant's transcendental logic. It undermines the assumption of thought's creativity with regard to its object and reveals the hidden empiricist presupposition of that productivity. For, »the individual being is not taken up under its universal concept through a free activity of the I [...]; the individual being is rather apprehended under that concept immediately in perception« (SW IX, 119).

How does Fichte's transcendental logic succeed in opposing common logic's circularity, i.e., its inevitable and yet undesired presupposition of *Sein* – of thinking's own *Dasein* and of the material existence of its content? Contrary to his own earlier philosophical position – and somehow contrary to Hegel's contemporary idea of speculative logic – Fichte now recognizes the need for thinking to presuppose an ultimate ground of meaning. To this extent, Fichte is more a follower of the pre-critical Kant of the *Beweisgrund* than a follower of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Fichte's transcendental logic is the attempt to reconcile Kant's 1763 work with the 1781/87 *Critique*.

Unlike formal logic, transcendental logic acknowledges the necessity of presupposing an ultimate ground of meaning. The truly *transcendental* starting point of philosophizing is gained if – and only if – logic begins by placing thinking *within* that presupposition. Fichte expresses this position

as follows: »Man is born in knowing; his *Dasein* brings knowing with itself with no further intervention from his part« and even without requiring an act of freedom. However, if such *Wissen* is itself the point of contact with a presupposed content, it is not »simply intuition, the opposite of thinking, but is rather – at the same time and in one – thinking, *Begreifen*.« The presupposition is eliminated insofar as it is integrated in the nature of thinking, thereby becoming its necessary starting point. Under these conditions, *Wissen* no longer needs to be enacted by a presupposed »I think.« »*Wissen* thinks absolutely through itself and its own essence, and cannot think in any other way but by being in the inseparability (*Unzertrennlichkeit*) of intuition and thought« (SW IX, 120). The ›I think‹ is a consequence of this regressive movement.

Fichte's idea of transcendental logic hinges upon the critical understanding of its fundamental difference from common logic. Common logic produces only that which has already been produced. Such is the illusory creativity of thinking exhibited by general logic and by Kant's insufficiently transcendental logic. »The I does not think, it is *Wissen* that thinks. And when the logician shows up and fabricates his universal concept, this concept is already there« as a given. That the concept is a product of thinking is an illusory appearance built on an inescapable factual presupposition. At stake is the issue of what is *ursprünglich* in thinking. *Wissen* – not the logician's I – thinks *ursprünglich*. And yet, the I can re-produce the original – it can »*nachmachen* und *nachbilden*,« can produce according to the model once the model has been given. The product of logical thinking is only reproduction. Fichte pushes his argument a step further. Not only formal and transcendental logic refer to different processes, construct a different concept or have a different image of what thinking is; they also have a different understanding (or consciousness) of what they do. »Transcendental logic knows that what it does is mere reproduction of the original life of knowing. Common logic, instead, claims to be the first and original thinking.« Even within transcendental logic, the original presupposition remains a *presupposition*. But it is a presupposition recognized as absolutely necessary. Transcendental logic accepts the presupposition of a *Wissen* that is so constituted as *Wissen* constitutes it, and rests content within that presupposition as mere *Nachbild*. Fichte's logic is transcendental, »weil sie sich erkennt als darüberschwebend über dem wahren Denken« (SW IX, 121). Transcendental is the perspective that arises from the recognition that »the original« is necessary presupposition of all

meaningful thinking, is the logical and ontological space within which thinking is necessarily and from the beginning inscribed. This unavoidable presupposition of the original preceding all thinking and all consciousness echoes Kant's presupposition of Being in the *Beweisgrund*.

3. Fichte's Different Beginning: *Bild* vs. *Sein*

By recognizing the necessity of placing logic within the original presupposition of thinking, the nature of that presupposition is radically transformed. This is the turning point of Fichte's argument and the beginning of his transcendental logic. Here is the move from *Sein* to *Bild* (from being to image) and, consequently, to *Werden* (becoming). The starting point of logic is *Bild*, an image as image to which presupposition belongs in a constitutive way (SW IX, 141). Thinking is image, not being.

Common logic cannot be »organon« of science because it remains at the insight »that (*daß*) it has what it *has*,« namely, a certain content. It possesses no sight (»hat kein Auge«) for a need different than a merely »historical revision of what is given.« Fixed on what is there, common logic has no intellectual organ for sensing truth as it cannot »see« beyond what is given. Despite all his efforts, Kant remains blind to what is not empirically given. The task of a truly transcendental logic instead is to »look away from factual being,« to look right *through* it, pointing its eye on »the becoming, on the genesis.« The question of common logic regards the sheer fact of being – its *daß*; the question of transcendental logic regards its »whence« – the »*Woher* des Seins« (SW IX, 127). Common logic speaks of »*being*,« transcendental logic speaks of »*becoming*« (SW IX, 128). At this point, Fichte's divergence from Kant becomes explicit. Kant's logic asks the (wrong) question of »how this or that determination of thinking is possible within the already constituted body of knowledge« – which must be presupposed in its factual existence (SW IX, 129). The famous question concerning the possibility of a priori synthetic judgments regards just one of those many possible determinations of given knowledge. On Fichte's rendering, Kant's aim would be to search out our knowledge to see if anything a priori is given in it (SW IX, 130). Fichte's transcendental logic addresses a different, more original (and hence more transcendental) problem, namely: »how is knowledge itself possible?« (SW IX, 129).¹⁶ At stake,

¹⁶ Kant had explicitly rejected this question, KrV Vorrede, AXVII.

for Fichte, is the *genesis* of knowledge itself, not the clarification of certain conditions of knowledge once its existence is presupposed.

Thus, Fichte's transcendental logic begins with a fundamental shift from *Sein* to *Genesis*, whereby the given structure of *Wissen* is reproduced in the process of its becoming and the fixed being of what is there is dissolved into its genesis (SW IX, 131). Being owes its being to thinking. The fundamental task of transcendental logic is to show that *Wissen* can arise only through itself. Such a task reveals the non-Kantian assumption of Fichte's transcendental logic: the »form of thinking« is the »form of things« (SW IX 132) – an identity of thinking and being that, as we will see, is the foundation of Hegel's speculative logic. Embracing its necessary presupposition, the starting point of transcendental logic is indeed the claim that knowledge or representation *is*. This, however, is not the fixation on *Sein* that impairs common logic. That *Wissen* is, means that »it is absolutely an image as image« (SW IX, 133). Thereby, Fichte's transcendental logic accomplishes the shift from *Sein* to *Bild*. Knowing is displaced from the realm of being to that of becoming and representation. The crucial (logical and ontological) difference between being and image is logic's »absolute Denkform« (SW IX, 136). Thinking does not try to capture particular determinations (of things through their alleged a priori). It directly addresses the higher space of »sense and meaning (*der Sinn, die Bedeutung*)« in which any determination can be taken up as meaningful. The discovery of this presupposed space of meaning preceding all determinate meaning as that in which all determination is ultimately grounded is the »root and the innermost essence of the organ for philosophy« (SW IX, 137; 151). Thereby, Fichte's transcendental logic is finally promoted to organon of philosophy.

Paradoxically, this promotion owes much to the influence of a thesis that Kant defends in his pre-critical work *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (a thesis that he explicitly rejects in the first *Critique*). Therein, Kant establishes the concept of *Dasein* as the original, *unvordenklicher Grund* of all possible content of thinking and of all possible meaning.¹⁷ Kant's only possible argument is echoed in Fichte's later expositions of the WL as well.¹⁸ Fichte is convinced that Kant's

17 See *Beweisgrund*, AA II, 63–165; in particular *Betrachtungen* 1–3.

18 See, for example, the 1810 WL.

early insight into the nature of being would already have sufficed to raise him above all his predecessors (SW IX, 137). He does not seem to notice an essential difference between Kant's pre-critical and highly metaphysical thesis on being, and his critical claim according to which »being is not a real predicate of things«¹⁹ – a thesis that Fichte renders with an emending explanation as follows: »Being is not a determination *but only that of which all determination is predicated.*« However, Kant ends up missing the fundamental insight hidden in this claim, and relapses into the logic of a presupposed »substrate«: Being becomes »logical subject.« Hence the correction proposed by the full circle of Fichte's transcendental logic: Kant »should have said: *Sein is that through which all determination is understood,* and which, in turn, is understood through the determinations.« Thereby, the starting point of Fichte's transcendental logic is presented as a correction of Kant's thesis on being. All determination is image and expression of the original being that precedes all thinking and from which all meaning derives. Being is »the one absolute foundation of all understanding and knowing« (SW IX 138).

This absolute foundation establishes, at the same time, the difference between *Sein* and *Bild*, whereby Fichte's distinctive view of being is gained. Since transcendental logic replaces the empiricist assumption of being (the *fact that* being is) with the genetic process *through which* being is (or becomes what it is), *Sein* must be the open horizon established by »life« and by the fluid becoming of its process, not the closed and fixed structure of what is given once and for all. Hence, the presupposition is being as open-ended process of becoming, as »inner life« of thinking (SW IX, 138f.). This is the starting point of logic. Thereby, Fichte presents a new insight into the origin of the world-view proper to his philosophy. This is the »relation of logic to philosophy or transcendental logic« to which his 1812 lectures are dedicated. »Instead of a system of dead things, of a matter that should form itself to consciousness and concept, what has become for us is a spiritual [...] life [...]. Instead of matter and death, we have spirit and life« (SW IX, 139). On the basis of a new concept of transcendental logic, philosophy is able to see for the first time an indeed transfigured, world.

19 The wording of this thesis is already in the 1763 work, see *Beweisgrund*, AA II, 72 (*Betrachtung* 1, §1).

The synthetic function of logical thinking is guaranteed only »if an image is presupposed as absolute foundation, not when a being is presupposed« (SW IX, 159; also 163). Unlike being, the image is constitutionally dual. Its presupposition belongs essentially to what the image is. *Bild* necessarily refers to a *Gebildetes*, i.e., to a second term outside of it to which the image is open and toward which it moves in order to become what it is. There is no being of the image distinct from its being-image – *Bild* presupposes no other *Sein* but its *Bild-sein*. Only the open-ended dual structure of *Bild*, not the closed and self-sufficient presupposition of *Sein*, can provide the »necessary starting point« of transcendental logic (SW IX, 143). The genetic method of this logic is predicated upon the assumption of *Bild* as starting point. Being dissolves in the flux of the image whereby it becomes meaningful knowledge. Image is the »opposite« of Being as »eternal and indeterminable and not-becoming (ewig und unbestimmbares, und nicht werdendes)« (SW IX, 147), and, ultimately, as completely »empty« form. For Fichte, the formality of formal logic is not due to its willful abstraction from all content (as Kant's explanation has it) but to the inevitable emptiness of its meaningless presupposition – »das reine, lautere formale Sein« (SW IX, 144) in which there is nothing to think of. Fichte gets here close to the famous beginning of Hegel's logic: *Sein* – at least *this* formal *Sein* – is *Nichts* (SW IX, 148).

The image, starting point of transcendental logic, allows thinking to abandon the empty formality of being and to gain the dimension of *Werden*. The content of the image is becoming and relation to other, expression and manifestation – *Äußerung*. Content and determination are first established by the productive manifestation proper to the image as image. Determined content is produced as »*Tat des Werdens*« (SW IX, 154) – as a deed of becoming.

In sum, according to Fichte, the crucial error of formal logic and of Kant's transcendental logic is the lack of recognition of the necessity for thinking to be grounded in the presupposition of *Sein*. If such presupposition is not recognized, it remains ›outside‹ of logic haunting it as sheer empirical fact or as undesired thing in itself. In both cases, knowledge is impossible unless enacted by a presupposed ›I think'. The reduction of *Sein* to logical subject (Kant's standpoint in the first *Critique*) is an illusion. If, on the contrary, the presupposition of thinking is recognized and accepted as starting point of a new, properly transcendental logic, being is transformed into the image of being – *Sein* within transcendental know-

ing is *Bild*. The emptiness of merely formal, meaningless *Sein* yields to the open, intrinsically dual dimension of *Bild*, to the becoming of its expression.

4. Hegel's Speculative Logic: Being – Nothing – Becoming

The first volume of Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*, the *Logik des Seins*, appears in Nürnberg at the beginning of 1812. Fichte holds his lectures on transcendental logic in Berlin in two sessions respectively in the summer of 1812 and in the winter of 1812/13. Joachim Widmann and Reinhard Lauth have discussed whether Fichte's lectures may contain a reply to Hegel by focusing exclusively on the issue of historical evidence.²⁰ They do not address the broader systematic problem of the different idea of logic underlying Fichte's and Hegel's works. This issue, rarely raised in the literature, concerns me in the conclusion of these reflections. My task, however, is limited to the following question. In what sense does the beginning of Fichte's transcendental logic on the one hand and that of Hegel's speculative-dialectical logic on the other systematically refer to the problems left open by Kant? I argue that this common reference is expressed in a radically different conception of the beginning of the logic, namely, in the notion of *Sein*. At stake is logical method. For, despite his criticism of Kant, Fichte still pursues a *transcendental* logic. Hegel, on the contrary, thinks of the logical relation between form and content *dialectically* as »absolute form.«

I shall proceed in an utterly a-historical manner. I present the way in which Fichte's 1812 logic would appear if considered from the perspective of Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*. Showing that Hegel and Fichte are both

20 See R. Lauth, »Eine Bezugnahme Fichtes auf Hegels »Wissenschaft der Logik«,« cit.; J. Widmann, »Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Einführung in seiner Philosophie,« Berlin, 1982, 37. The topic of the relation between formal, transcendental, and dialectic-speculative logic in relation to Kant, Fichte, and Hegel has not received much attention in the literature, and no recent publication is dedicated to the topic; see the study by M. Zahn, »Die Idee der formalen und transzendentalen Logik bei Kant, Fichte und Hegel,« in: *Schelling-Studien*, Festgabe f. Manfred Schröter, hrsg. v. A.M. Koktanek, München, Wien, Oldenburg, 1965, 153–192; W. Bröcker, »Formale, transzendente und speculative Logik,« Frankfurt a.M., 1962; J. Kopper, *Transzendentes und dialektisches Denken*, Köln, 1961.

responding to Kant, I assess Fichte's logic from Hegel's perspective. Instead of asking whether Fichte in his lectures is indeed answering to the publication of Hegel's 1812 work, I present Hegel's hypothetical answer to Fichte. This is only apparently the opposite than investigating Fichte's reply to Hegel. Fichte is maybe closer to Hegel now than he was at the beginning of the century. And yet, he is still follower of Kant's transcendental philosophy. A better understanding of the specific *transcendental* character of Fichte's logic can be gained, I believe, by measuring the distance that separates him from Hegel at this later date.

Hegel's speculative logic is based on a conception of thinking as »*objektiver Gedanke*« that brakes with Kant's transcendental, i.e., in Hegel's view, merely subjective notion of thinking. Objective thinking recuperates the insight of traditional metaphysics, which sees the truth of things in their »concept.« However, significantly, Hegel sees speculative logic as true fulfillment of Kant's critical task. Eventually, »true« metaphysics (or »metaphysics proper«) is critically grounded in and as speculative logic.

Hegel's logic rejects the transcendental standpoint by setting the program of an immanent development of the pure forms of thinking insofar as they are, at the same time, structures of reality – and this independently of a presupposed thinking I (or subjective consciousness) that would have to think along the logical process. The standpoint of consciousness and its constitutive »opposition« of subject and object is eliminated in the moment of »*absolutes Wissen*« at the end of the *Phenomenology*.²¹ The completion of the phenomenological movement allows Hegel's logic to begin in the thoroughly new »element« of pure thinking. It follows that, within speculative logic, the issue of *Wissen* is no longer addressed. Pure thinking is identical with pure being. The problem of absolute knowing is a phenomenological, not a logical problem. Speculative logic no longer lays claim of being organon of philosophy. It is rather the methodological foundation and the first part of the system of philosophy.²² For Hegel, sub-

21 See A. Nuzzo, »The Truth of »*absolutes Wissen*« in Hegel's »*Phenomenology of Spirit*,« in: *Hegel's »Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. by A. Denker, Amherst, NY, Humanities Press, 2003, 265–294.

22 See A. Nuzzo, »The Idea of »Method« in Hegel's Science of Logic – A Method for Finite Thinking and Absolute Knowing,« in: *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 39/40, 1999, 1–18; and »Absolute Methode und Erkenntnis der Wirklichkeit in der Philosophie Hegels,« in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift f. Philosophie*, 3, 1996, 475–490.

jective thinking and knowing – proper both of formal and transcendental logic – are results that presuppose the complete presentation of the pure forms of objective thinking offered by the *Wissenschaft der Logik*. In Hegel's system, formal and transcendental logic are a matter either of »phenomenology« or of »psychology« as parts of a philosophy of subjective spirit. Speculative logic provides their systematic foundation.²³

With regard to these two conditions characterizing Hegel's dialectical-speculative logic – the elimination of the thinking subject from the logical beginning, and the rejection of the centrality of consciousness for the cognitive value of logic – we can see that Fichte's 1812 lectures, unwilling to abandon Kant's transcendental standpoint, try to institute the position of »absolute knowing« within logic thereby claiming to eliminate the presupposed ›I think‹. This move leads Fichte to the issue of *Sein*. Viewed from Hegel's perspective, however, Fichte's transcendental logic can be characterized as the enterprise of continuing the *Phenomenology* after its conclusion; as the attempt to think through the concept of *absolutes Wissen* without noticing that it necessarily leads out of the dimension of *Wissen*, to the sheer empty beginning of a logic that can no longer be transcendental.

Logic begins, for Hegel, in the one and only systematic point in which no presupposition can be detected. This is the meaning of ›beginning‹: absolute *Voraussetzungslosigkeit*. Fichte's claim, on the contrary, is that thinking must necessarily meet its own inescapable presupposition. Threthereby he rejects formal logic and emends Kant's transcendental logic. There is no logical thinking without presuppositions (Hegel would claim: there is indeed no phenomenological knowing without presuppositions). The task is to recognize the necessity of the presupposition by integrating it into the beginning itself: *Sein* becomes *Bild*. However, in Hegel's view, this is but another clear sign of Fichte's incapability of thinking purely, i.e., logically or with no presuppositions. Fichte's incapacity of leaving the standpoint of the *Phenomenology* expresses the same limitation. As Hegel argues in the *Encyclopaedia* »Phenomenology,« Kant – and with him Fichte – remain at the determinations of a phenomenology of spirit and are unable to move

23 See *Enzyklopädie*, §467 Anm., §415 Anm.

on to a speculative »philosophy of spirit.« They are ultimately unable to begin *speculative* logic.²⁴

If for Hegel is indeed Kant's merit to have reclaimed the »introduction of content«²⁵ in logic, this does not mean that the empty formality of logical form should be left aside – as Fichte's transcendental logic resolutely advocates. While Kant failed to recognize the immanence of thinking within the real world of contents, Fichte lacks the courage of facing the meaningless void the pure form – of »*Sein, reines Sein*« identical to nothing. To be sure, Fichte does see the necessity of *Sein* for logic, and yet, unable to attribute to it a different role than that of mere presupposition, he does not dare to face the void of its empty form and must resort to *Bild*. With this concept, he believes to have both: an *aufgehobene* presupposition and a form full of content. On this issue, we can clearly measure the un-dialectical character of Fichte's transcendental logic. While he does feel the need of articulating logical thinking in the dimension of *Werden*, he construes the becoming of the image *in opposition* to the fixed completeness of *Sein*. Thereby, he institutes an alternative – or better a Kantian antinomy with no solution. In Hegel's terminology: Fichte's perspective allows no *Übergang* from *Sein* to *Werden*, hence, no *immanent* determination of indeterminate being; his beginning is construed on the assumption that such »transition« is impossible. Such transition, on the contrary, is Hegel's chief concern. Ultimately, this is the reason for Fichte's holding on to the logic of presupposition and to the duality of *Bild*. Since, for Fichte, no immanent movement of determination is possible out of the totally empty and formal space of being, determination and meaning can arise (or become) only under the condition of their being already presupposed within the structure of the image. This explains the lack of the moment of *Nichts* in the sequence of Fichte's transcendental logic – a sequence that may otherwise remind us of the initial articulation of Hegel's logic. The movement and becoming of Fichte's transcendental logic is not immanent – and therefore is not immanently derived through a »transition« from being – because this logic does not recognize the constructive force of the moment of *dialectic negativity*. Significantly, the closer Fichte gets to acknowledge the

24 See *Enzyklopädie* §415, Anm. Fichte's philosophy is also mentioned in the same passage.

25 *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bände*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer, H.M. Michel, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1986, vol. 5, 29.

function of negativity is his rejection of the meaningless form of common logic's *Sein*. While for Hegel »das reine, lautere formale Sein« (SW IX, 144) – to put it in Fichte's words – in which there is nothing to think is, in its meaningless emptiness, the same as *Nichts* with which speculative logic begins, for Fichte the negativity therein encountered is the clear sign that logic has to find a different beginning, namely, *Bild*.

Moreover, from Hegel's perspective, Fichte's refusal to see the determining power of pure negativity at work within the empty formality of being, by leading him to the opposition (*Gegensatz*) between *Sein* and *Bild*, is responsible of another distinctive character of his logic. Fichte's transcendental logic does not provide the true beginning of pure thought but is only the expression of a *reflexionslogische* position. In the framework of Hegel's speculative logic, Fichte's *Bild* is a concept that belongs to the logic of essence, to the dual constitution of the movement of reflection, to the alternate logic of *Setzen* and *Voraussetzen*.

To conclude, the following would be the final assessment of Fichte's transcendental logic from the position of Hegel's speculative-dialectical logic: Fichte does not leave the phenomenological standpoint of (absolute) knowing (*Wissen*); he does not think purely and formally as he cannot face the negative power of *Sein*'s lack of meaning, namely, its dialectical identity with *Nichts*; consequently the »becoming« that his logic promotes against the fixity of being is not the result (or the immanent determination) of the identity *Sein=Nichts*, but a mere presupposition. Fichte's logic of *Bild* is *Wesenslogik* to which, indeed, being is presupposed. Clearly, Hegel's *Seinslogik* is based on completely different systematic and methodological conditions than Fichte's transcendental logic.

Coda

In a manuscript passage of the lecture-course on logic of the summer 1812, Fichte refers to a »new philosophical writer« who Lauth identifies as the Hegel of the just published *Seinslogik*, the first volume of the *Wissenschaft der Logik*. Significantly, Fichte's passage addresses the problem of the transition between *Sein* and *Werden*.²⁶ Since such a transition is, in Fichte's

26 The problem echoes also the issue of God's creation.

perspective, in principle impossible (*Sein* must be replaced with *Bild*), he can follow with laughter the »*Kunststücke*« to which Hegel (or the new philosophical writer) resorts to take himself out of the embarrassing »absolute contradiction« that separates *Sein* from *Werden*.²⁷ If Lauth's suggestion is correct, it confirms the analysis provided above.²⁸

27 See R. Lauth, »Eine Bezugnahme Fichtes auf Hegels »Wissenschaft der Logik«,« cit., 460.

28 Contrary to Lauth, E. Fuchs thinks that the passage refers to Herbart. The reference, however, is not so crucial to my claim: in any case, Fichte rejects the possibility of a »transition,« which is precisely what makes a dialectical logic impossible for him.

Practical Rationality and Natural Right: Fichte and Hegel on Self-Conception within a Relation of Natural Right

C. Jeffery Kinlaw

In a recent paper, Frederick Neuhaus raises the following question: »what kind of self-consciousness is it whose conditions are supplied by the concept of right?«¹ Most Fichte scholars agree that a preliminary answer must include two components: (1) an agent who understands herself and acts freely as a causally efficacious being, and (2) an individual whose identity as a free, rational being (FRB) is interconnected in a proto-communal relation with other FRBs. One trajectory within the secondary literature finds an inconsistency between (1) and (2) that threatens the unity of Fichte's project in the *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (GNR). The specific charge is that (2) endorses a concept of individuality that is inter-subjective, communal (an I that is we and a we that is I), and based upon mutual recognition and trust, whereas the FRB of (1) is exposed upon analysis as having been, from the start, a stealth rational, specifically Hobbesian, egoist. I call this interpretation the Siep-Williams View (SWV), though components of it are shared by others.² Their primary claim is that Fichte

1 »The Efficacy of the Rational Being (First Proposition: § 1), in *Johann Gottlieb Fichte: Grundlage des Naturrechts*. Herausgegeben von Jean-Christoph Merle (Berlin: Academy Verlag, 2001), 40.

2 See Ludwig Siep, *Prinzip der Praktischen Philosophie: Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie des Geistes* (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 1979); *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992). Robert Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); »The Displacement of Recognition by Coercion in Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts*, in *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*. (ed.) Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002),

abandons the proto-communal self-conception shared by individuals mutually recognizing and respecting one another as FRBs in favor of a relation of right underwritten by coercion.

I argue that SWV is incorrect and work out the argument in the context of an account of the practical self-conception possessed by a rational agent within a relation of right. I compare Fichte's view with Hegel's description of a person in his *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (GPR). Despite Hegel's rejection of Fichte's theory of the state, he offers an account of a person's self-conception within a relation of Abstract Right strikingly similar to Fichte's treatment of FRBs in the GNR. Both take persons (FRBs) to be causally efficacious agents who appropriate parts of the sensible world to fulfill projects satisfying basic desires and inclinations – in sum, as property owners and traders in commodities. Both find the concept of natural right to be inherently fragile and trace that fragility to a common source, namely, the primitive form of practical rationality exercised by FRBs. One result of this rudimentary practical self-conception is that rightful relations are, following Kant, purely external relations.³ Most important, for Fichte and Hegel, though more thematically for Hegel, the relation of right and the form of practical rationality operative within it are abstractions from more refined and advanced forms of practical self-determination at work in moral agency for Fichte and ethical life for Hegel.

My argument focuses on the connection between the fragility of right and the rational self-conception of persons in rightful relations. Fichte's reliance upon coercion to enforce rightful relations is a direct response to the fragility of natural right and not the abandonment of the proto-communal concept of recognition. The root error of SWV is its assumption that persons mutually recognizing one another as FRBs justified in their

47–64. Hansjürgen Verweyen. *Recht und Sittlichkeit in J. G. Fichtes Gesellschaftslehre* (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 1975). Klaus Brinkmann, »The Deduction of Intersubjectivity in Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts*, in Breazeale and Rockmore, 5–17.

3 A criticism common to SWV is that rightful relations should be internal as well, though there is disagreement concerning the extent to which Fichte's account of recognition (*Anerkennung*) logically commits him to a version of internalism. As we shall see, Williams is perhaps the most outspoken critic, arguing specifically that recognition, properly construed, is at least a proto-ethical concept ostensibly effecting genuine transformation in one's practical self-conception.

respective spheres of action also exercise a more sophisticated form of practical rationality associated with autonomous moral agency, that is, the Rousseauian/Kantian sense of non-instrumental rationality as a guide for human action. Accordingly, the SWV projects elements of moral autonomy back into the self-identity of FRBs – thus the description of recognition, especially by Williams, as expressing mutuality and trust – and then unsurprisingly faults Fichte's theory for not meeting expectations that the theory was never designed to meet. FRBs or persons display only the most rudimentary level of practical rationality, their conception of practical reason being strictly instrumental. Thus we find more substantive accounts of practical rationality and mutual recognition in Fichte's *System der Sittenlehre* and in Hegel's description of ethical life.

My paper is divided into four sections. First, I give a general overview of Fichte's derivation of recognition from the concept of a FRB and indicate how recognition is shaped by the concept of a FRB, a point overlooked by SWV. I conclude this section with a reconstruction and critical assessment of SWV. Second, I provide an account of Hegel's concept of a person in GPR and show how that concept informs his theory of Abstract Right, most notably his own assessment of the fragility of Abstract Right. Third, I turn to the problem of the fragility of right in Fichte's GNR and argue that his pre-occupation with security and coercion is a direct response to the precariousness of right. I then conclude with a brief, and thus formulaic, appraisal of the salient flaw Hegel finds in Fichte's theory of right, namely, Fichte's failure to unify right and morality – an assessment common also to SWV. The basic difference between the two theories, as I read them, is Fichte's refusal to acknowledge the capacity for any political institution to be an institution within which the ends of autonomous agency can be fulfilled and thus within which autonomous agents can identify in the working out of the demands of moral autonomy and the ultimate expression of one's freedom.⁴

(1) In GNR Fichte derives a theory of recognition from the concept of a FRB whose self-consciousness as a FRB presupposes a relation of mutual recognition with other FRBs. Being an FRB involves simply the capacity

4 Admittedly, this assessment might provide some ammunition for SWV, that is, in taking Fichte, despite his intentions, as more closely aligned with classical liberalism than with Hegelian communitarianism.

for free causal efficaciousness in the sensible world, that is, the ability to project goals and muster the resources to attain them. Note that Fichte takes the concept of a goal in GNR 1–4 to be nothing more refined than an end designed to satisfy human needs, desires, and inclinations. What Fichte seems to have in mind is simply the most basic form of practical self-determination. And for that purpose a FRB only needs an instrumental conception of practical reason.

Acts of FRBs are acts of self-determination and self-limitation. Denise, for instance, decides that she will pursue a particular goal and appropriate a certain object or sector of the natural world in order to attain her goal. As Fichte had argued in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, all acts of self-limitation presuppose an original impetus that elicits some action as a response. Since practical self-determination is a free act, that impetus must come in the form of a solicitation (*Aufforderung*) to free activity, what Fichte calls »the subject's being determined to self-determination.«⁵ The FRB is solicited simply to perform some public act and do so of her own free will; she can comply with or ignore the summons. The motive for her action remains inconsequential and thus indeterminate – here Fichte follows Kant's insistence that motives are irrelevant to rightful actions – but, again, there is no reason to assign more refined motives than satisfaction of desires, particularly since an agent's chosen sphere of action is the basis for property claims. So far, as we shall see, Hegel agrees.

Fichte's next step is to argue that solicitation is possible only on the assumption of a relation of mutual recognition (*Anerkennung*). Since the initial solicitation is also freely issued, (a) the solicitor necessarily views himself as a FRB, which of course presupposes that he has responded as well to a previous solicitation. Furthermore, (b) the solicitor must have some evidence – enough, that is, to convince the solicitor that the one solicited can respond – that the one he summons is a FRB, since issuing the summons entails that he takes her as a FRB. But she cannot act effectively as a FRB unless he grants her some sphere within which she can act without interference, thereby affirming that she is generally justified to act as she does. And (c) her response to the solicitation presupposes that she views the solicitor as a FRB, thus committing her to accepting the justification of

5 Fichte, *Fichtes Werke III*, herausgegeben von Immanuel Hermann Fichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 32. Hereafter cited as *FW III*. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

his claim to a particular sphere of action for his own chosen ends. (a)-(c) demonstrate that individuality is a proto-communal concept – in Fichte's words, »*mein und sein, sein und mein*« – whereby individuals are bound and obligated to one another by their very existence.⁶ From (a)-(c) Fichte then derives the concept of right: limit your freedom so that other FRBs can exercise their freedom.⁷

The SWV contends that Fichte's theory of right is unstable. Stated in general terms, the objection is this: the foundation for right shifts from the proto-communal relation of solicitation and recognition to force as the real underwriter of rightful relations. The shift becomes apparent in Fichte's pre-occupation with security and protection. Fichte over-reacts to the inevitability of dispute and violation of rights, yet this over-reaction is indicative of a deeper commitment to a practical self-conception inconsistent with mutual recognition. How so? After deriving the law of right from recognition in *GNR* 1–4, Fichte notes that an agent's obligation to treat others rightfully is doubly conditional, namely, assuming that she actually wills the existence of a community of free beings and that her recognition of and respect for another's freedom is reciprocated. Since, for instance, Joe's perpetual and perfect respect for Denise's rights, something of which Denise can never have absolute certainty, alone binds her to treat Joe rightfully, the primary purpose of right becomes protection of property. In short, *Rechtsgesetz* becomes *Zwangsgesetz*. The proto-communal relation of recognition is transformed into an association whose foundation is protection. The source of this shift is an inconsistency in Fichte's conception of rational self-understanding, that is, between (1) and (2) mentioned in the opening paragraph of the paper. A self-conception defined by the prudent choice and execution of ends – that is, by rational egoism – displaces the proto-communal individual self-conception grounded in mutual recognition. Whereas Fichte's theory of recognition could have provided a significant advance on standard seventeenth and eighteenth century theories of political obligation, his shift after *GNR* 1–4, when he turns to the application of the theory of right to rational egoism

6 *FW III*, 47–48.

7 Note that the freely accepted self-limitation of one's sphere of action is based upon the concept of the other as a FRB.

and coercion converts his theory back into a traditional social contract theory after all.⁸

The SWV certainly is less uniform than I have indicated so far. Although neither Siep nor Williams connect the fragility of right with the *rudimentary* practical rational self-conception of a FRB, a connection which I shall develop and argue for in section three, Williams clearly is the less sympathetic and, as it turns out, less accurate and persuasive critic. Siep in my judgment offers a more nuanced explication of Fichte's theory, an account that is more appreciative of the complexity of Fichte's view.

According to Siep, the principal limitation of Fichte's theory is this: whereas recognition imposes self-limitations on one's possible courses of action, recognition itself is never what one *intends* when acting.⁹ Recognition must be presupposed as a given, but one's intentions are assorted, commonplace aims one projects along with the most prudent means for attaining those ends. Since one's specific intention is superfluous for the preservation of rightful relations, Siep concludes that Fichte is committed as well to a generalized account of motive, namely »universal egoism« or standard rational self-preservation.¹⁰ And the institutions designed to pre-

8 Neither Siep nor Williams draw this specific conclusion, but it follows from their critique of Fichte's theory of natural right.

9 *Prinzip der Praktische Philosophie*, 35.

10 Ibid. As stated above, this conclusion reads as a standard non-sequitur. Intention is distinct from motive and thus provides no inference warrant for propositions about motive. I think, however, that Siep means something like the following: mutual recognition is supposed to be operative regardless of anyone's specific reasons for acting, and an agent thus is not required to have recognition as her primary aim when acting. Recognition, as Kant had argued regarding rightful relations, is a negative requirement: respect the other's freedom and don't violate her designated sphere for action. Accordingly, Fichte can assume standard reasons for action. Denise, for instance, acts to achieve a certain goal and chooses to pursue that goal because it fulfills her interests. As stated earlier, though, whether her interests are expressive of a single overarching motive, that is, self-preservation or rational egoism, is another matter.

Motive then is the root problem for Siep. The reference to intention, in my judgment, is a distraction from the critical point he wants to advance. Consider the issue from a different angle, that is, in strictly Kantian terms. For instance, Denise's specific intention when acting, say planting a modest garden on a small tract of land, is not instructive for determining the permissibility of her action. The issue is the principle on which she acts, namely, a principle which justifies her decision to

serve rightful relations, the law of coercion and the State, operate on the premise of universal egoism not recognition. This explains, Siep argues, Fichte's accentuation of the problems of mutual security, whose resolution, importantly, is effected by institutions that supersede recognition.¹¹ The charge of universal egoism, as Siep constructs it initially, seems unconvincing: the fact that Fichte assumes that FRBs act prudently, or even additionally that they operate with an instrumental conception of practical rationality, does not entail that he is committed to a theory of rational egoism – in sum, that he is a Hobbesian.

Siep develops the argument more fully in *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus*. The root problem Siep diagnoses is the tension in Fichte's account of subjectivity between proto-communal recognition as a necessary condition for self-consciousness and structure of the will whose object is itself and its future, namely, its own individual ends.¹² So Fichte presents us with a tension between a proto-communal conception of individuality and a self-regarding will. This tension underlies the strain in his proposed corrective to the violation of rights: restoration of trust vs. absolute assurance of security grounded in the mechanical application of the law of coercion. On the one hand, as Siep perceptively indicates, the Fichtean reaction to violation of one's rights is not reciprocated violence but rather a reconsideration of the other's trustworthiness and thus the

plant the garden. Planting the garden per se becomes permissible or not given certain conditions: whether a precedent claim as been made on the land and, important for this example, whether Denise acts on the principle that one is justified in ignoring property claims when it is in one's interest to do so. Siep then can concede that an agent doesn't have to make recognition the intention of her action, but rather must adopt mutual recognition, and thus the law of right, as the global principle governing the execution of her intentions. Revised, Siep's objection can be presented thusly: Fichte's description of the will suggests that agents act uniformly according to their rational self-interest, and there is no guarantee that they will adopt the law of right as a restraint on their interests. As Fichte emphasizes, Joe's respect for Denise's rights at time t_1 doesn't entail that he will continue to respect her rights at t_3 , hence the need for the law of coercion and the authoritarian power of the State. But this means that force underwrites the law of right, not recognition, and the shift to coercion is made from the premise of universal egoism that agents like Joe can be expected to act from self-interest.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus*, 36.

prudence of trusting him in the future.¹³ This makes good sense, assuming that rightful relations are grounded in mutual recognition and respect. And yet, Fichte anchors the certainty of protection in law *überhaupt* – law applied without exceptions – and this, for Siep, is where Fichte departs from his initial deduction of right. Why does Fichte require absolute assurance of the other's perfect future compliance with the law of right if one simply needs a restoration of trust? Why ground security in the law of coercion and by extension in government intimidation¹⁴ if the state's primary aim is to restore trust? Unless, of course, one expects FRBs to act uniformly according to what they take to be their best self-interests. If one expects agents to act generally from rational self-interest (and it is easy to construct a rational decision model in which it is generally in one's calculated best interest not to cooperate with others), then the stress upon security and coercion naturally follows. And, the reversal of the conditional also seems persuasive: if Fichte grounds the law of right ultimately in protection and coercion, that is, if coercion is doing all the work, then he does so because he assumes the general motive of self-interest. This then, according to Siep, is the linchpin: universal egoism is Fichte's central anthropological principle after all.¹⁵

Consider again the thrust of the Siep objection: a general assumption of rational egoism supersedes the proto-communal rational self-conception of mutual recognition. Suppose then that recognition of the other is effectively blocked by, for the most part, the unbridled pursuit of self-interest. What does this entail about the agent's capacity for rational action? Doesn't Siep's objection presuppose that the capacity for mutual recognition means that an agent can subordinate her particular desires and inclinations to higher universal ends, namely, respect for another's rights, independent of her desires and inclinations – in sum, that she is an autonomous agent who can exercise non-instrumental strategies for rational action? If so, that would mean that she can exercise moral autonomy, and would intimate strongly that Siep believes that recognition is a moral concept. Some commentators maintain that Fichte's refusal to integrate

¹³ Ibid, 57–58.

¹⁴ Thus Siep points out that the excessively intrusive authority Fichte sanctions for the state is present at the very beginning of his legal theory. See *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus*, 59.

¹⁵ Ibid.

law and morality is the core weakness in his theory of right.¹⁶ Siep never states explicitly that recognition is a moral concept, though his argument suggests otherwise.

Williams, by contrast, is more certain, and holds that recognition is not merely a negative relation. In short, Williams insists that solicitation and recognition are ethical concepts which disclose an ethical dimension to inter-subjectivity and concern ethical action.¹⁷ Accordingly, this makes Fichte's shift to protection and coercion all the more egregious. And yet, he takes a further and more important step beyond Siep's criticism.

According to Williams, recognition brings about liberation from a Hobbesian state of nature and thereby inaugurates a relation of mutuality and trust among individuals. Recognition and right involve actions »whereby individuals are *reconciled* with one another.«¹⁸ »In this way the suspicion, mistrust, and violence of the state of nature are supposed to be overcome.«¹⁹ This means that mutual recognition produces actual transformation within individuals and in the way in which they relate to others. Recognition grounds inter-subjectivity and makes natural right an internal relation. Williams seems to have in mind a thick conception of mutuality and trust. Not only does it allow Denise, for instance, to plant her garden without fear that Joe will vandalize her work, steal her vegetables, or force her off the land, but Joe's recognition means also that he displays some basic commitment to facilitating her well-being. He isn't required to feel obligated to assist her occasionally, but his relation to her and her projects seems, on Williams' view, to involve more than simple non-interference. Williams never makes this type of claim directly, but it certainly ap-

16 See Verweyen, 112–113. Verweyen argues that the *volonté générale* Fichte attempts to forge from the protection and unification contracts fails, precisely because no *moral* transformation is required when one enters those contracts. Any attempt to produce a genuinely communal will from a collection of rational egoists is an exercise in alchemy.

17 See *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other*, especially 59–64.

18 »The Displacement of Recognition by Coercion in Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts*,« 49 (emphasis mine). The full text reads as follows: »Fichte opens the transcendental to intersubjectivity and introduces the idea of an intersubjective mediation of reason and freedom. His thesis is that right is an action whereby individuals are reconciled with one another; it is a mutual, voluntary self-limitation that solicits, and permits the other to exercise freedom.«

19 Ibid, 51.

pears to follow from his insistence that recognition is an ethical relation with transformative power over human community.

Consider Williams' objection that Fichte's theory of right harbors two incompatible views of recognition and community: (1) one based upon recognition and effecting »transition from the state of nature to a civilized condition grounding social contract and rights in intersubjective freedom,« something akin to a »general will constituted by reciprocal freedom;«²⁰ (2) the second being a coercive body designed to deter transgression of rights and compensate for breakdown in trust and security. (1) and (2) produce an antinomy: on the one hand, mutual recognition supposedly eliminates a general posture of mistrust and uncertainty: its »telos is liberation.«²¹ Were (1) Fichte's final position, legal relations would have a moral foundation capable of yielding a genuinely integrated human community. Yet Fichte opts for (2) the other side of the antimony, and emphasizes the violation of rights and the cognate problem of protection. Legal relations are underwritten and preserved solely by force. Recognition ultimately grounds only external relations!

I find no evidence in Fichte's GNR that recognition provides the pathway out of a Hobbesian state of nature. As we shall see in section three, when Fichte discusses the inevitability of the violation of rights and the resulting conflict, he does so in more benign terms than the clash of Hobbesian egos. Accordingly, I find unconvincing Williams' claim that recognition brings about a transformation in human subjectivity, that is, from a previous state of rational self-interest. Fichte never employs the expression »state of nature,« and the argument of GNR 1–4 is a deduction of the concept of right from the conditions of self-consciousness. Recognition is a necessary condition for one's self-conception as a FRB; it doesn't transform that self-conception. In sum, Williams expects more from Fichte's notion of recognition than it was designed to deliver. For Denise to understand herself as a FRB, she has to be able to formulate the concept of a goal and envision how to accomplish it. And she can take herself to be a rational agent only if she views herself as generally justified in pursuing her aims, again, for instance, planting her vegetable garden on a tract of land. To see herself in this way entails that she must be recognized as such. On

²⁰ Ibid, 54.

²¹ Ibid, 56–57.

this reading, rightful relations are external, but that is exactly what one expects from Fichte's devotion (following Kant) to a strict distinction between law and morality. The claim that recognition grounds external and purely legal relations is thus a description, not a criticism, of Fichte's account, unless one assumes that recognition is a proto-ethical principle that entails an internalist view of rightful relations.

The SWV, as we have seen, turns on the important assumption that a FRB in a relation of right has a practical self-conception complex enough to enable her to relate to others with refined trust and moral commitment. In Hegelian terms, SWV tends to assume that a FRB in a relation of mutual recognition sees in the other not merely someone who can mediate his relation to objects of desire as in contractual relations, but rather as one in relationship with whom he can find higher fulfillment (e.g. friendship or family) while remaining a particular individual. I find no justification for this assumption in GNR. My obligation to treat another as a FRB only requires that I concede to her rightful spheres of action within which to pursue her personal projects. My motivation for doing so is secondary at best. Actually, my self-conception simply as a rightful agent involves nothing more than the pursuit of ends within a functional arena in which others freely pursue similar ends. Right, as Hegel insists, governs business! Right is neither a moral concept, nor does it involve the higher refinements of autonomous agency. The error in the SWV is its failure to distinguish between the proto-communal concept of individuality in GNR and a moral community within which persons relate to one another in more advanced ways than simple owners of property and parties to contracts.

(2) It is instructive that some Fichte scholars have questioned whether one's self-understanding as a FRB is a thick enough concept to ground the necessity of right, particularly since right presupposes mutual respect for another's property rights. One's answer depends in part on what one takes Fichte to have accomplished in GNR 1–4. If we adopt the SWV, the answer is evident: Fichte cannot derive the concept of an agent whose proto-communal self-conception involves trust and moral commitment from the thin concept of a free and causally efficacious being. Yet, as I have argued, Fichte doesn't pursue that project. Neither does Hegel whose account of rightful relations among persons is even more perspicuous in its awareness of the limited practical self-conception possessed by agents whose relationship is strictly legal. Hegel uses the term *Personlichkeit* to describe

the practical self-consciousness of rightful agents. Persons are Fichtean FRBs, agents exercising their free efficacy by projecting ends to satisfy desires and inclinations.

Hegel describes the self-conception of a person as the individual will of a subject, that is, a particular individual whose self-reference is abstract and whose will has for its content determinate ends it encounters in the world.²² He characterizes a person as lacking the opposition between universality and particularity, its universality being its »simple reference to itself in its individuality.«²³ What Hegel means is that a person is a discrete individual who projects ends based upon his desires and inclinations and chooses among those available ends. He has the reflection to transcend his desires, which comprise the sole »content« of his will, but doesn't necessarily identify with any given desire. In his primary self-conception he is utterly indeterminate but nonetheless »remains tied to this content [his desires, etc.] as to the determinations of his nature and of its external actuality.«²⁴ In sum, a person can reflect upon his desires and their objects, choose which desires to fulfill (which objects to pursue), but does so without any self-regulating project apart from desires and inclinations.²⁵

While a person may transcend his desires and inclinations and choose which objects of desire to pursue as ends, he is guided by no concept or strategy distinct from the maximization of his desires. For this reason, Hegel characterizes a person's freedom as arbitrary (*willkürlich*), meaning that his choices are simply bare choices: his *Wille ist Willkühr*. Even though he pursues ends satisfying his desires, there is no intrinsic connection between his choices and what he chooses; he can do whatever he wills to do,²⁶ and that is the sole basis for his choices. Whether he acts on desires A or B and pursues an end to fulfill A or B is utterly contingent, thus Hegel's description of a person's will as *zufällig*.

22 *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. Herausgegeben von Eduard Gans (Verlag von Duncker und Humboldt, 1840), 34. Hereafter cited as GDP. All translations are mine.

23 Ibid, 35.

24 Ibid, 14.

25 The person who transcends his desires and inclinations relates to himself as something unspecified, indeterminate, thus Hegel's charge that his self-relation is abstract.

26 Ibid, 15. » [...] daß man tun könne, was man wolle.«

I maintain that there is a structural similarity between the practical self-conception of Fichte's FRB and Hegel's person. Persons related rightfully to one another – more specifically, agents who enter contracts – are FRBs precisely in the arbitrary and contingent sense Hegel describes. They routinely order and prioritize various ends designed to satisfy desires yet the rational regulation of their projects is strictly instrumental. Being causally efficacious in the natural world only purchases a minimal rationality and fails to embody what Hegel or Fichte view as genuine freedom. Thus Hegel writes: »Choice, instead of being the will in its truth, is on the contrary the will as opposition.«²⁷ The source of the deficiency lies in a FRB's or person's practical self-understanding: what she wills doesn't derive from her own self-formative nature. What she wills to do is her own choice, but she naturally chooses on the basis of desires and inclinations. She doesn't subordinate her desires to a higher self-formative strategy that she has designed autonomously and freely embraced.²⁸ In this sense, her desires and inclinations remain alien to her volitional system. Put differently, she lacks a thick capacity for second-order desires; that is, she may approve of the desires she has, but those second-order desires are not based upon any clear principles. She is an agent whose rational self-interest is similar to Rousseau's proto-rational agent who has developed the capacity for self-reflection indicative of his evolvement from instinctive action to instrumental rationality. For Fichte and Hegel, she is the type of rational agent whose relation to others is strictly legal, precisely because her form of agency involves commerce and contracts.

One might make the following objection, however. For Fichte, recognition entails a more refined and nuanced self-conception than a simple capacity for prudential behavior. Mutual recognition is a necessary requirement for having self-conception as a FRB. This is correct, but the capacity for free efficacy requires only the virtue of prudence. Even though Denise can subject her desires to a higher principle, namely, the law of right, her doing so doesn't constitute actual autonomy. Mutual recognition and the law of right are necessary conditions for prudent and effective action, but this doesn't entail that the law of right is a principle Denise has given her-

27 Ibid. »Die Willkühr ist, statt der Wille in seiner Wahrheit zu sein, vielmehr der Wille als der Widerspruch.«

28 Compare *FW III*, 148 where Fichte maintains that humans must be educated, including self-education, to become autonomous moral agents.

self and with which she can identify as the basis of an institution within which her freedom finds fulfillment. FRBs are not mere prudential agents, since they can embrace the law of right as a self-limitation of their freedom. But there is a difference between subjecting one's freedom to a higher principle for mere instrumental and natural reasons and doing so because it is the right thing to do. The latter introduces a higher principle – the motive of lawfulness itself – whereas the FRB understands herself abstracted from any ability to uphold the law of right for its own sake.

Since persons do not act according to self-prescribed universal laws, the law of right (Abstract Right) confronts them in negative form as an obligation.²⁹ Right is a universal injunction, and mere persons cannot transcend their particular wills and subordinate them to a universal end projected *von selbst*. Hegel writes: »right is an acknowledged actuality against which parties must forgo their particular aims and interests.«³⁰ As mere persons, Denise and Joe relate to one another as property owners; their primary relation to commodities mediates their relation to each other. Accordingly, for Hegel (and for Fichte), the primary institution within the sphere of right is contract.

One might argue that this account differs from Fichte's view of recognition in the following way: mutual recognition is mediated by a FRB's exercise of free efficaciousness. Recognition obligates Joe to acknowledge Denise's justification (and treat her accordingly) to appropriate a relevant sphere of action within which to pursue her ends. By respecting her freedom, Joe relates to Denise directly. His respect for her is logically prior to his respect for her property. There is no reason that Hegel must deny this claim. What precisely does Joe treat as inviolable when he respects Denise's freedom? He doesn't intrude upon her sphere of action, namely, the part of the natural world she appropriates to pursue her ends. According to Fichte's view of property, anything Denise appropriates to actualize her freedom, beginning with her body, becomes a property claim. Joe thus respects Denise's freedom precisely by not intruding upon what she claims as hers. Their mutual relation of right is mediated by mutual recognition of their respective spheres of action, and spheres of action are property. Even if respect for freedom is logically prior to respect for property, re-

29 The lone exception: »be a person.»

30 GPR, 86.

spect for property is the way in which Denise and Joe mutually recognize one another's freedom.

The practical self-conception of persons shapes, as Hegel indicates clearly, the nature and function of contracts. Contracts presuppose some proto-communal relation between the contracting parties in the sense that both persons subject their wills to an independent objective principle. A contract is »the unity of different wills whose difference and particularity are renounced.«³¹ The proto-communal relation is quite limited, however. Although Denise and Joe are united as agents by their commitment to the terms of their contract, their wills remain *particular* precisely because they are *willkürlich*. Their proto-communal relation of recognition in contracts doesn't alter their self-conception as persons.

Hegel identifies three features of contracts all of which indicate the deflationary concept of community which underwrites contracts and the narrow practical self-understanding exhibiting by contracting parties.³² (1) Contracts are established by purely contingent decisions. Each party enters a contract solely as a means to an end believed to fulfill some desire. (2) The object of contracts (object of some desire) is some external thing, since only external things (commodities) can be the object of a *willkürlich* decision. And most important, (3) the unity established by contracts is contrived because it is a unity *posited* by contracting parties for the sole purpose of obtaining private ends; the unity is »only mutual, not universal in and for itself.«³³ Although contracting parties submit their particular ends to a universal objective principle, that principle has only relative universality, again because it is a posited, and thus contrived, universality and as such remains opposed to the particular wills of the contracting parties.³⁴

Hegel's deflationary concept of recognition within rightful relations should be evident. In one sense Hegel's view of recognition within Abstract Right is thinner than Fichte's. In part one of GPR Hegel mentions recognition directly only in connection with contracts – contracts presuppose recognition. It is reasonable to assume, however, that Hegel affirms that one's self-conception as a person entails some sense of mutual recog-

31 Ibid, 72.

32 Ibid, 75.

33 Ibid, 75. » [...] nur gemeinsamer, nicht an und für sich allgemeiner.«

34 Ibid, 81.

nition. On the other hand, decisions to enter contracts are prudential and contingent, as is the mutual recognition underwriting them. The decidedly *willkürlich* nature of recognition exposes a pronounced fragility within the nature of right. For Hegel, the transgression of rights is not simply a relative inevitability, but rather the logical result of the development of opposition within the nature of right, namely, between the rigid particularity of a person's will and the universality and objectivity represented by the law of right. Crime and punishment follow necessarily from the fragility of right and mediate the transition to the higher standpoint of morality.

(3) Two Fichtean FRBs in a relation of right are obligated to respect one another's freedom. This requires that (1) each support the inviolability of the other's legitimate sphere of action and (2) treat the other as a FRB. (2) demands that no one be treated simply as an object, namely, as something to be exploited precisely because it isn't a FRB. That is, FRBs are ends in themselves. This means that one's effort to influence another involves rational persuasion rather than manipulation. Were Denise and Joe consistently to respect one another's freedom, they would never treat each other arbitrarily, nor would they ascribe to themselves the power to do so.³⁵

Consistency in upholding the law of right, however, depends upon Joe's or Denise's choice. And why should Denise consistently and perpetually treat Joe rightfully? Simply put, there is no absolute reason why Denise should act consistently rightfully unless, as Fichte maintains, she discerns a need to do so.³⁶ This claim is particularly illuminating since it highlights the limited self-conception of mutually recognized FRBs and the fragility of the concept of right which binds them to one another. Consider what this claim involves.

(a) FRBs act upon a strictly instrumental model of practical rationality.

They project aims to satisfy desires without subjecting their desires to any non-instrumental principle. Although they act principally from self-interest – they even remain faithful to contractual obligations from self-in-

35 *FW III*, 86. Actually, were Joe and Denise to treat each other rightfully with perfect consistency they would not be able to violate one another's rights because doing so would conflict with their basic self-understanding.

36 *Ibid.*

terest – they are not atomistic (Hobbesian) agents. Denise and Joe indeed remain generally faithful to the obligation of right. Not only is mutual recognition a necessary condition for either to have a practical self-conception, but also only a rightful relation between them grants them the basic assurance that they will not encounter unjustified obstacles when pursuing their ends. Obstacles, and thereby ensuing conflict, will arise inevitably, however, and this is the source of the fragility of right. The conflict arises from natural human limitation and emerges even within a stable rightful relation.

Consider again Denise's decision to plant her garden on a particular plot of land. Joe is obligated to respect her appropriation of this plot for her garden. But this presupposes that Joe actually knows that Denise has decided to plant her garden on this land. How though is Joe to know *in every instance* when claims such as Denise's have been made? Suppose that Joe has also staked a claim to the same plot (let's assume that this particular plot is ideal for a garden) while being unaware of Denise's interest in the same plot. Surely, we can't assume that either Denise or Joe can prove that she or he made the claim first and thus has rightfully exclusive access to the land. And, accordingly, why should either back off from her or his claim? So conflict can arise naturally – and it is reasonable to say inevitably – within a rightful relation from lack of omniscience, and, as Fichte indicates, it *emerges prior to the application of the law of coercion*. This problem of ignorance can be resolved by Denise's or Joe's public declaration of the place where she or he intends to plant a garden. Declaration is a necessary step, but it doesn't eliminate the problem, precisely because mutual declaration might be extended toward the same plot, and, again, neither party can demonstrate that she or he was first in line for appropriation of that plot. Either Joe or Denise must withdraw the claim, or conflict ensues. Note, however, that the refusal to withdraw doesn't indicate that either rejects a rightful relation in this instance, but only that he or she doesn't acknowledge the other's claim to this plot of land in this instance. Thus even within a consistently rightful relation conflict (and perhaps a state of war) can transpire prior to the application of coercion.

Once conflict materializes, there are three alternatives: one party withdraws its claim, coercion, or mediation.³⁷

Whereas FRBs are not Hobbesian egoists, their choices display precisely the restricted sense of practical rationality Hegel attributes to mere persons. Fichte therefore contends that

(b) one can make only a hypothetical case for upholding the law of right.

Denise and Joe must will a community of free beings. Of course, willing a community of free beings generally and doing so in every instance, particularly when doing so impedes the fulfillment of one's perceived ends, are different matters.

Together (a) and (b) reveal clearly the root problem of the fragility of right – again, the deflationary rational self-conception of FRBs – and explain Fichte's persistent concern with security and his resort to external measures (force) to sustain rightful relations. Right, as Hegel and Fichte agree, presupposes dispute and thus the violation of rights, whether unintentional or criminal. Once transgression occurs, Fichte argues, there is no non-question begging argument capable of persuading a FRB that the rightful relation can be restored.³⁸ The law of right demands absolute consistency, but is Denise to know whether Joe's treatment of her will be consistently rightful unless she has foreknowledge of all Joe's future actions toward her? Fichte writes: »Accordingly, that which is supposed to prove others' rightfulness and capacity for rightfulness only proves it insofar as what is to be proved is already presupposed, and [what is to be proved] has no validity or meaning if it is not presupposed.³⁹ Note, however, that the argument stated in the cited passage applies equally to relations of right in general, that is, when no violation of rights has occurred. Denise's respect for Joe's rights at *t*₁ does not entail that she will continue to treat Joe right-

³⁷ See *FW III*, 124–125. Consider also that Joe's relative assurance that he has a stable rightful relation with Denise is a necessary requirement for him to manipulate her with a successful strategy of deception. After all, unless average Americans assumed that the Bush administration deals with them honestly and forthrightly, the Bushies would not have been able to deceive, and continue to deceive, American citizens about the justification for invading Iraq.

³⁸ *FW III*, 81.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

fully at t_3 ; her rightful action depends upon her contingent decision to uphold the law of right consistently. FRBs act only from prudential motives and employ an instrumental model of practical rationality. They, like Hegel's persons, lack the capacity to subordinate their inclinations and desires (and ends they project to satisfy those inclinations and desires) to a higher non-instrumental rational strategy. Since, in Hegel's language, they don't will the universal, their relation to the universality and objectivity of the law of right is indirect, namely, mediated by prudential reasons for entering rightful relations. As a result, Fichte cites only prudential reasons (protection and cognate reasons) as justification for forming a Commonwealth.

(4) I have attempted to demonstrate that the SWV is incorrect precisely because it imposes an alien model of practical rationality onto FRBs in a relation of right. For Fichte, but obviously thematically for Hegel, natural right is an abstraction from the more complex and nuanced volitional system and practical self-conception possessed by humans. But this means that the self-reference exhibited by FRBs relating to one another solely in relations of right is nonetheless strictly that of a rational agent in the most rudimentary sense. The capacity for autonomy requires a higher standpoint, one in which a FRB can subject her entire moral psychology to a universal principle which she assigns to herself. Law and morality remain distinct standpoints.

There is some justification, however, for the criticism that the self-conception of a FRB precludes the establishment of a genuine political community. Real community requires the development of moral autonomy and thus the refinement to interact with others with devotion and trust. Clearly, for Fichte, this type of community cannot emerge by means of citizens' investment in the institutions of the State. The State's primary *raison d'être* is protection. At best, submission to the universal will of the State, which is offered for prudential reasons and thus by what Hegel calls an arbitrary and contingent decision, can only provide preparation for the development of a higher moral self-conception.

From Hegel's perspective, namely, the State as the unity of right and morality as the ultimate ethical institution, Fichte fails to unify right and morality. Hegel maintains that one's moral autonomy is actualized and fulfilled within the social and political institutions of the State. A citizen discovers within political institutions a legitimate source of practically ration-

al authority to which she can contribute as a free citizen. Rather than being, as an autonomous moral agent, alienated from social institutions, she finds her autonomy fulfilled precisely in her contributions to those institutions. In Hegelian language, she can »be with herself« as an autonomous agent participating in those institutions. For Fichte, on the other hand, right and morality remain distinct, exactly because Fichte does not view political institutions as capable of being spheres of action within which one's moral autonomy can be actualized. Perhaps, for this reason, genuine moral autonomy is an end for which one must perpetually strive.⁴⁰

40 I extend appreciation to Bärbel Frishmann, Wayne Martin, and Michael Baur for helpful comments on and conversations about an earlier draft of this essay. Remaining errors, of course, are mine.

Political Realism in Idealism: Fichte versus Hegel and their Different Versions of the Foundation of Right

Virginia López-Domínguez

The repeated treatment within German idealism of the problem of the foundation of Right and of its systematic place reveals concern about a more profound issue, whose roots lie in metaphysics and philosophical anthropology, and which has wide-ranging implications in the field of politics: such is the problem of the relationship between theory and praxis. The interest and concern raised by this problem at the time was undoubtedly due to the socio-political situation, that is to the explicit recognition by German intellectuals of the failure of the French Revolution and to the attempt to place the project of a new society on a firmer footing, overcoming the cause of this failure, which was none other than individualism, upon which the progressive disappearance of the public sphere had been based, as a result of the growing predominance of private interests.

Consequently, the question which idealism asked itself at this point was that of what the necessary and sufficient conditions might be for the transformation of the world, or rather, for the eventual concrete realization of a political project or ideal. The answer to this question was clearly hampered by the stage which had been reached by contradiction at the philosophical level, as a separation between theoretical and practical reason, between the world of necessity and that of freedom, between the external world of objects and the interior world of the I. The answer was therefore accompanied by a criticism of this separation, as the latter is presented in what Agnes Heller called »the first Kantian ethics« and which covers mainly the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Moral* and only in part the *Critique of practical Reason*, without ever considering the attempt made by Kant to conciliate between theory and praxis through teleological

judgment, or the application of the same in the field of the philosophy of history¹. It was precisely this first version of ethics which would be taken into account by Kantian jusnaturalists like G. Hufeland and Ch. E. Schmid when they carried out their respective deductions of the legal from the moral².

Fichte's *Foundations of natural Right* should be understood within this context, as a break with Kantian jusnaturalism and an attempt to place law as the necessary material mediator between theory and praxis, or as a bond linking nature and freedom. From the very beginning of the *Foundations*, in its Introduction, Fichte indicates the systematic place to be occupied by law very precisely and he does it by starting from the basis of the distinction between formulary philosophy and real philosophy. Formulary philosophy is of the kind that separates subject and object of thought and, precisely because of this, closes in upon itself and opposes itself to reality, becoming empty and abstract. Separated from the world, the theory loses its capacity to incide upon it, because the world is conceived of as parallel to thought and never convergent on it. It is interesting to note that this distinction between formulary philosophy and real philosophy appeared in an earlier work by Fichte, *On the difference between Spirit and Letter in Philosophy*³ where he uses many of the expressions which appears in this Introduction. That work was a response to the *Letters on aesthetic Education of Man*, in which Schiller, after reading the *Foundations of the entire Doctrine of Science*, had presented art as a mediator between the formal impulse and the sensitive impulse and, consequently, as the only method which might serve to heighten sensibility through exercise and culture up to the universality of moral life. The truth is that the proposal for aesthetic education was presented as a solution to the problem of the failure of the French Revolution, which had tried to impose an extremely elevated ideal

1 For more, see A. Heller: «La primera y segunda ética de Kant», in *Crítica de la Ilustración*, Barcelona, 1984, 21–96. For her interpretation, Heller considers the works by H. Saner, *Kants Weg vom Krieg zum Frieden*, München, 1967 and K. Weygang, *Kants Geschichtsphilosophie. Kants Geschichtsphilosophie*, Köln, 1963.

2 G. Hufeland, *Lehrsätze des Naturrechts und der damit verbundenen Wissenschaften zu Vorlesungen*, 1790 y Ch. E. Schmidt, *Grundriss des Naturrechts*, 1795. For more on this, see F. Oncina Coves: «Critica della ragione giuridica nella aetas kantiana e crisi del giusnaturalismo», in *Diritto naturale e Filosofia classica tedesca* (Pisa, 1996), 55–77.

3 GA II, 3, 329 ff.

upon citizens who could not live up to it; that is to say, the proposal was political and for this reason its final destiny was to culminate in the constitution of an aesthetic State. The ultimate reason for the failure resided in the separation between theory and praxis or more precisely, between rigorous Kantian morals, which managed without sensibility or even repressed it, and the real fact that instincts and sensibility are necessary in life and that their denial can only lead to a rebellion of the instincts or to the involution of the projects trying to be achieved without them. Although Fichte does not explicitly mention Schiller in his Introduction, the role played by this work in the development of his theory of law should not be underestimated⁴.

Seen in this light, Fichte's response to the problem of the rigorism and formalism of Kantian ethics is that law cannot be derived directly from morals, as jusnaturalists were then attempting to do; on the contrary, it played a mediatory role as a bridge between morals and sensibility, whose instinctive weight is plainly evidenced when one contemplates historical reality, dominated by constant injustice and war, i.e. the dominance of private or even openly selfish interests. As a consequence, for Fichte morality is reached via juridical and historical construction, in a coercive State (*Notstaat*) which educates and prepares men to live in a world where laws requiring external obligation will no longer be needed, where all will be free, in the Kantian kingdom of ends. In this way, at the crux of the issue the approach is still one of a Kantian nature and for this reason neither Schiller nor Fichte criticize him directly in their respective works. In fact, in the second paragraph of the Introduction, Fichte presents J. B. Erhard and S. Maimon⁵ as antecedents of his concept of the systematic place of law, recognizing moreover the extent to which he was surprised by his reading of Kant's *On Perpetual Peace*, a reading which he carried out after finishing the corpus of the work of his in question and which led him to review it. The surprise was due to the way in which it coincided with his own approach, a similarity of which Fichte makes mention in the Introduction⁶. But the coincidence between Fichte and Kant in what we would

4 X. Léon: *Fichte et son temps*, I, 473.

5 B. Erhard, *Apologie des Teufels, Beiträge zur Theorie der Gesetzgebung, Die Idee der Gerechtigkeit als Prinzip einer Gesetzgebung betrachtet* y S. Maimon, *Ueber die ersten Gründe des Naturrechts*.

6 GA I, 3, 323 ff.

refer to as »the second ethics« is not limited to these few isolated examples appearing in the text; there is in fact a more profound convergence, owing to the fact that in the *Perpetual Peace*, when analysing the problem of history, Kant resolves to face the question of empirics (the facts offered by history), not from a strictly theoretical perspective but from the angle of teleological judgment (the other regulative judgment) which then serves as a nexus to relate the empirical and the moral (since history is not a series of simple facts but of events, of human actions). Kant's approach to history rests on the idea of a teleological nature which converts the works of unsociability into effects of sociability, war into peace. That same idea is taken up by Fichte in his work, because law appears as the mediator between sensibility and morality thanks to the deduction of the body as an organism and not as pure brute material which works in accordance with mechanical dictates. It is precisely the deduction of the human body with these characteristics, laid out in Fichte as a means of expressing subjectivity and an instrument for its embedding in the material world, which will allow him to raise the question of nature again in his *Doctrine of science nova methodo* and to conclude from corporality the possibility and even the necessity of a treatment of nature as *natura naturans*, as an *analogon* of freedom⁷, since thanks to the body as an expression and instrument of will one can admit non-mechanical causality in nature, a causality for freedom and consequently, the effective (*wirklich*) capacity of the will to transform the material world.

Thus the systematic place of law is clear: it is an »autonomous and proper science«⁸ which derives directly from the fundamental principles of the Doctrine of science, and is fully independent of morals. Its fundamental aim is to find the rational need for the social and, therefore, it presents the problem of sociability as previous to that of morality. It presents it as previous in the sense that that which is deduced in the *Foundations of natural Right* is not the teleological community, the kingdom of ends, but the material condition for this kingdom to be possible in a concrete and real manner, i.e. a material community. The distinction

7 GA IV, 2, 256–260 Krause Nachschrift, 235–329 (Erich Fuchs'edition in F. Meiner). For a fuller treatment of corporality and its implications in Fichte's philosophy, see the article by V. López-Domínguez, »Die Idee des Leibes im Jenaer System«, in *Fichte-Studien* XVI, 273–293.

8 GA I, 1, 172.

between the two aspects of the concept of community is basic to Fichte's thinking and was already achieved by him in his early works, as for example in his polemical text on the French Revolution.⁹

The basis of the material possibility of law is a real community of rational beings, and real means here that the community must be in space and, therefore, a community of bodily, incarnated, rational beings, for law is expected to constitute itself in the sphere of the external as a »second nature«, given that fundamentally it passes judgment on acts or, at all events, on the external effect of intentions and not the mere intentions of agents. It is through this desire for the concrete that Fichtean philosophy, in spite of being idealistic (Fichte prefers to speak of real-idealism or ideal-realism¹⁰) will culminate, as in Hegel, in a *Realpolitik*.

Despite the years which passed between Fichte's work and the *Philosophy of Right*¹¹, it is in the same context which was initially shown that one should interpret the defence made by Hegel in the Preface of a speculative science of law, which implies an approach towards the political world based on the understanding and assessment of its objective contradictions and not of merely subjective representations, such as good intentions or the awareness of duty. The defence of the objectivity of Right, and the need for will to be exteriorized in the world in contrast with the real, answer in Hegelian thought to the primacy of the historical-political¹² and they represent a profound criticism of the empty and abstract subjectivity upon which the concept of the individual is based in modern society. This criticism is two-pronged: it is directed against the moral sentimentalism of Fries and against the Kantian moral of oughtness. In this way Hegel rein-

9 *Beiträge zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die Französische Revolution*, GA I, 1, 276. For this, and the need to distinguish both concepts of community from that of State in order to make sense of anarchistic statements made by Fichte, who is remembered in the history of thought as one of the main theoretical founders of the modern national State, see the article by V. López-Domínguez: »Sociedad y Estado en el pensamiento político de J. G. Fichte«, in *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía* V (1985), 111–121.

10 See, for example, *GWL*, GA I, 2, 410–412.

11 *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechtes*.

12 For this interpretation I follow closely the article by Domenico Losurdo, »Razionalità del reale e educazione alla politica in Hegel«, in *Razón, libertad y Estado en Hegel* (Ed. M. Álvarez Gómez and M.C. Paredes), Salamanca, 2000. See especially 150–152.

forces his rejection of subjectivist philosophies, already expressed in his early works, e.g. in *Faith and Knowledge*, and developed at length in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* under the different forms of divided, and therefore unhappy, consciousness.

Opposed to modern virtue, a prisoner of the individual and of subjective interiority, Hegel recovers the ancient idea of virtue, which is ethical (*sittlich*) virtue, saying that the truth about law is to be found in ethical life, i.e. not in morality, and he makes references in praise of Plato as a theoretical representative of this ethical virtue. As is shown in the *Phenomenology*, the value which ancient virtue retains in modern times lies in the fact that in it one can find the two fundamental keys for overcoming that mortal disease of modern society, individualism, which are the socialization of the individual in the ethical substance and the admission that rationality is not a subjective patrimony and is partly given in the world.¹³

As a consequence of this approach there arises in Hegel the identity of the real and the rational. It then becomes clear that the systematic place of morality is after Right, as had occurred in Fichte, and that the aim of this placement is to lead us to a realistic politics, to an ethical life which, by synthesizing law and morals, will allow us, as Kant said in the *Perpetual Peace*¹⁴, to be as shrewd as snakes and as candid as doves, and consequently to assume a new relationship between theory and praxis which will contribute in an efficient way to the liberation of the alienated I.

As for the idea of natural Right, we can say that both authors coincide, given that according to them both, it is that which corresponds to man according to his nature. Thus, the point of departure for the deduction of Right in both authors is the rational being, the free will which cannot self-consciously impose itself as such without becoming an individual, and the subject in law can never be identified with the moral individual¹⁵. The aim of this step must be understood, then, as an attempt to find a rationality in social life which stood apart from morality. A good illustration of this is provided by the distinction between two different types of natural Right which Hegel gives in Paragraph 502 of his *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*. The distinction serves to clarify the concept of natural Right being used by Hegel, which is none other than that which he makes explicit

13 GW IX, 212.

14 Appendix I.

15 GNR, Par. 1–5 and *Grundlinien*, Par. 7 and 34–35.

in the first two paragraphs of the Preface to the *Grundlinien*, where he recognizes that law is a concept of pure reason, an idea, and that the question tackled by the philosophy of Right is therefore that of understanding its essence autonomously, observing »the immanent development of the thing itself«. A similar definition can be found in Fichte.¹⁶

However, what is very striking is that Hegel so openly rejects the state of nature as something which he says he does not take into account at all when thinking about the constitution of law, because, although it is true that the state of nature is not considered in the deduction, it cannot be forgotten that the objective spirit is a part of the complete development of the spirit and that this development, before coming to Right, has undergone the necessary previous determinations to reach such a point of objectivation and that among those previous determinations was the state of nature, specifically, in the ambit of the subjective spirit, under the figure of recognition between self-consciousnesses and its conversion into the dialectic between master and slave. In that passage the state of nature was described as violent, and dominated by force and, as a consequence of this, irrational and unjust, for in it dominance is exerted by those consciousnesses which affirm themselves in the world with most power.

The state of nature also appears in a veiled form in Fichte's *Foundations* when he deduces otherness and, unlike Hegel, he presents the originating intersubjective meeting as a harmonious relation, through which the individual is recognized as a rational being, even before he effectively becomes one, as occurs in the case of a child, who is moreover received by the community of rational beings within whose bosom the path is opened for him towards full rationality through culture and education¹⁷.

What is interesting is that this supposition determines the concept of the State, for one can help observing that whenever an aggressive or hostile account of the state of nature is given, as in the cases of Maquiavelli, Hobbes, Kant or Hegel, the State is presented as an unavoidable and necessary phenomenon – in Hegel, even as a »real God«¹⁸ which, through the development of its judicial and police apparatus prevents a return of the social whole to the state of nature – whereas whenever the state of nature is presented as a place for dialogue and acceptance (Herder, Fichte) the

¹⁶ GA I, 3, 319.

¹⁷ GNR, GA I, 3, 347.

¹⁸ *Grundlinien*, Par. 270.

State becomes superfluous in itself, although historically necessary for men to develop their rationality and finally achieve, perhaps »within myriads and myriads of years«¹⁹, as Fichte puts it, sufficient moral capacity to live without it in anarchy, independent of a juridical framework whose coercive function would then become irrelevant because unnecessary.

The fact of whether the State plays a definitive role in the history of human society or is only considered as an essential but surmountable phenomenon seems to be directly related to the way a supposed state of nature is conceived; or, putting it another way, it is related to one's idea of the role played by nature in the constitution of society.

In the case of Fichte the point of departure for deducing the subject of the law is the rational being, who as such possesses the following two characteristics: freedom and limitation. At heart the ideas put forward at this point are, as we will see, very similar to those of Hegel: an unlimited freedom such as that which might be found in an absolute I is nothing, because it would dissolve in the vacuum of an infinite yearning, it would only be an aspiration towards absolute affirmation, so that in order to have a fuller reality, the I must determine itself, become a limited individual I and, precisely because of this, achieve realization (*Wirklichkeit*) and efficiency (*Wirksamkeit*)²⁰. The individual deduced by Fichte is the juridical person²¹, and his constitution as such is described by means of the phenomenon of appropriation.²²

The manner in which each person appropriates his freedom, leaving others free, consists in assuming his own body, taking control of a part of nature, a part of the non-I, which the subject admits as his own by converting it into an exclusive sphere of activity, into an untransferable field for exercising his freedom. This sphere is the human body. Through it the relationship which the I establishes with the world is channelled, with reference to both the objects and the subjects that are in it. The novelty of Fichte's approach resides in the fact that he does not only consider the body as an instrument for the realization of actions but also as the immediate place of the expression of subjectivity. The body can be an instru-

19 *Einige Vorlesungen in die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, GA I, 3, 37. See also *Beyträge*, GA I, 1, 283 and *Grundzüge*, GA I, 8, 307 f.

20 This interpretation is based above all on GWL, Par. 1,3,5,6 and 7 and GNR, Par. 1–7.

21 GNR, GA I, 3, 361.

22 GNR, GA I, 3, 319.

ment which mediates between the I and external objects due to the fact that it is recognized to have organicity: it is an organism which, as such, conciliates matter with purposiveness. The fact of its double attributes, the existence of two organs, one passive and the other active, related to two different types of matter, allows one to explain how free actions which are originated through a non-mechanical causality can end up inciding on the world and, in particular, how other entities which are not things, i.e. other rational beings, can be referred to. But if only these two characteristics were admitted, the body would be an instrument which still operated in a mechanical and external way between two isolated and enclosed substances. The novelty of Fichte consists in having attributed ductility (*Bildsamkeit*)²³ to the human body, which makes it matter racked with freedom, a mediator par excellence between the two worlds to which the body equally belongs, the external and the interior, that of necessity and that of freedom. Fichte became aware of the importance of his discovery and for this reason he developed it as far as its ultimate consequences in the *Doctrine of science nova methodo*, stating that body and soul were the same, one entity which may be considered from two different perspectives: external intuition and internal intuition²⁴.

Once again the author who serves as a starting-point for Fichte to arrive at this identity of body and spirit is Herder, precisely the same author who most resembles him from a political point of view²⁵. However, the Herderian arguments which Fichte uses in paragraphs V and VI of the *Foundations of natural Right* derive from a new intention. Herder believed that man is a being destined by nature to develop his intelligence, but he also believed that nature is the result of divine creation which had also organized natural forces and he therefore remits from man to God to think of the latter as the one who is ultimately responsible for reason and morality. Fichte, on the other hand, shows that the intrinsic rationality of nature, which only appears for the first and only time in man understood as a corporeal being, points to God as a goal and directs itself towards a God understood as the moral order of the universe; Fichte therefore remits man to himself, placing his historical destiny in his own hands and making hu-

23 GNR, GA I, 3, 380–383.

24 Krause *Nachschrift* 171. Compare with 211 f. amongst others.

25 See for example *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Teil I, Buch IV, especially Chap. 6 and 11, VIII, 6, 223 (Ed. Melzer).

man realizations, such as legal-political construction, the key element in the development of rationality and morality. Thus access to social life is a product of free will and can even be the object of a pact or contract.²⁶

Man as a corporeal being is the true mediator between freedom and necessity, for he is both things and can thus build a bridge for the teleological understanding of nature, a humanized nature which, as the repository of purposes in conjunction with the determination of the rational being, with its historical destiny (*Bestimmung*), demands respect for nature from man. For this reason, the only property ensured by natural Right is the person itself, the body itself, precisely for that reason it is legally inviolable.²⁷

This would be the first principle of originary Right (*Urrecht*), upon which the second would rest: the right to the free permanence of our free influence on the sensible world²⁸. The only private property which exists is that of corporeal and spiritual forces. The right to property of goods is only secondary, derived from the right to free actions and, therefore, closely linked to work, which is the reason why Fichte denies the validity of landed property and only recognizes the right to the use of land, totally rejecting the right of the first occupant, which to Kant was unquestionable²⁹. In this way, landed property is transferrable and even socializable, so long as the State always acts as the guarantor of its correct adjudication, insofar as it is the protector of the right to life and work of all its citizens.

In Hegel, the starting-point is the will, which is free, so that law becomes the realm of realized freedom, the world of the spirit which produces itself as second nature (Par. 4). This freedom is now presented as a particular freedom, which brings together the universal moment in the affirmation of the identity of the will with itself and the individual moment which arises in the decision, when the determination of an object of will, a determined purpose, is produced (Par. 7–8 and 25). The ground for abstract and formal Right is the person, the free will in and for itself, closed within itself, in the determination of immediacy, i.e. the consciousness which knows it is free and recognizes the universality of that freedom which is also in all consciences. This is, therefore, a formal, abstract free-

26 GNR, GA I, 3, 375

27 GNR, GA I, 3, 383.

28 GNR, GA I, 3, 409.

29 GNR, GA I, 3, 415 f., GA I, 4, 15, 20–25. *Der geschlossene Handelstaat*, GA I, 7, 54 f.

dom, lacking in content (Par. 34–35), or a consciousness which rests on the lowest degree of certainty of itself as freedom of thought not yet expressed in the world. But a freedom which is exhausted in the affirmation of will in itself, as identity of the individual consciousness with universal will, is a half-freedom which is consumed in the pure interiority of a plan or of unrealized principles. To become fully realized freedom has to become concrete, to leave its abstraction and become a phenomenon, manifest itself in the world. As in Fichte, this process is for Hegel one of appropriation (Par. 40–41) and requires a »sphere of freedom« in which action can be exclusively exercised. The most obvious difference between both authors is that for Hegel the realization of freedom is not achieved through the assumption of the body itself but through goods external to the will, through the appropriation of things, which is justified and legitimated by the very essence of things, which are defined as »lacking in freedom, personality and rights«. We are dealing, then, with the possession of a mechanically conceived nature which is inert, non-teleological and consequently unfree (Par. 42). The purpose and the destiny of these objects is none other than that of being possessed and used by a rational will, since it is in this way that they are, so to speak, raised to and included in the spiritual plane.

The process of appropriation is described and justified in a way which is reminiscent of the moment of the beginnings of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* by means of desire. In this sense, it is not surprising that Hegel should refer to just this passage in Paragraph 35, although it should be remembered that he does this in order to highlight the peculiarity of the level of the system at which he finds himself working at that moment, which, unlike the previous one, does not find itself in the ambit of the subjective but of the objective spirit. As occurred in the case of desire, in the process of appropriation the I takes over nature destroying it in its mere objectivity, denying it its independence, consuming it in its difference. Precisely this step of consumption of the object in the satisfaction of desire will come up again in the next dialectic, that of the master and the slave, displaying itself in this case as an aspect of a more complex movement: that of the consumption of the world by the master, united to its opposite aspect: the production of the world by the slave. Bearing this comparison in mind, it might be said that the legal grounding which Hegel carries out is that which corresponds to the figure of the master, although since we are at a higher level than that of the dialectic of self-consciousness, it should also be said that the basic juridical relation in modern soci-

ety cannot be that of slavery, based on the possession of the life of another, but the relation between free subjects, who only appropriate things, or put another way, the relation between owners of property. Paragraph 57 of the *Grundlinien* contains a definite rejection of slavery because of its »absolute injustice«, considering it a form of primitive social ordering which has been overcome and which is fitting of a state of nature.

However, what cannot at any rate be denied is that the juridical subject turns out to be the property-owner and that private property is inviolable in the Hegelian philosophy of law and that, therefore, its grounding legitimises the rights acquired by those who had already exercised the right to appropriation, by the heirs of those masters who to Hegel seem so remote in time and level of the spirit. It is true that in Paragraphs 67 and 80 Hegel claims that the worker is the owner of his working capacity and can cede it to another person in a free contract; but it is also true that faced with a situation in which the survival of the State is placed at risk, such as war, the State may dispose of that working capacity and place it in the service of its defence by sending its citizens to war, whereas nothing gives it the right to act in the same way with regard to the property of private individuals³⁰. In this way, the »substantial« social stratum in the political constitution, apt to act as a mediator between the permanence of the monarch and the mobility inherent to civil society, represented by its parliament members, is the property-owning class. There is no doubt that it is the basic stratum in the political constitution of the State and Hegel therefore calls it »the class of natural ethical life«, since it is based on the family and, for its subsistence, on its possessed goods, its patrimony being »independent both from the patrimony of the State and from the insecurity which characterizes industry, the desire to make earnings and the variability of property«. The political preponderance of this class is therefore based on the greater independence of its will, which is assured by converting the patrimony which it enjoys in an inalienable hereditary good taxed on its entailed estate (Par. 304–307). The basic mission of the State can be no other than to protect the legal subject upon the basis of whom it has been constituted, it can be no other than that of protecting private property.

This same thematic direction may explain Hegel's rejection of cosmopolitan society, although in principle it could have been the most adequate

30 Par. 299, Annex and Par. 326.

solution in the field of international politics for a way of thinking such as his. National States function in an international context like individuals, although not like moral subjects³¹. The realization of their freedom is made explicit in a territory, since they possess a patrimony to be defended against the desire of others for appropriation. Conflicts between them are settled by means of international treaties and whenever discrepancies are not resolved, the final solution for disagreements is found in war (Par. 334). Hegel shows that the Kantian hypothesis of perpetual peace maintained by a federation of States which arbitrates in all disputes is the central part of an idealistic view of politics which does not understand the true nature of real relations between States, since it is only an idea of reason based on moral or religious faith (Par. 332). For this reason, the destiny of national spirits is settled in the realization of history, that playing-field of particularities in which passions, interests, purposes, talents, virtues, violence, injustice, vice and external contingency intervene. History is the universal tribunal (Par. 340).

In this area of international politics, the difference between Hegel and Fichte is significant, because although it is true that Fichte does deal in the *Foundations* with the idea of an organic State, i.e. a State which closes in upon itself in a search for internal coherence to achieve its purposes, an idea which re-occurs in *The closed commercial State* and in the *Addresses to the German Nation*, it should not be forgotten that along with nationalism there also remains the idea of cosmopolitanism as a constant which transcends his first position as laid out in writings on the French Revolution, for example, in the discourses *On the Patriotism and its opposite*³². The patriotism is the first step to cosmopolitanism, and this idea should not be understood as a defence of aggressive expansionism, of colonialism or imperialism, for the way in which national formation is extended to all the species is not that which corresponds to desire, which annihilates its object in order to achieve self-identity and, consequently, satisfaction; it is not the model of relation which exists between the I and the non-I, but that of reciprocity between rational beings.

Nonetheless, if we ask ourselves the reason for the set of differences which exist between the two authors as far as their groundings of Right

31 Par. 337.

32 GA II, 9, 399.

are concerned, I believe the answer could be as follows. Whereas Fichte makes a bridge from theory to praxis, taking human corporality as a nexus, and in doing so manages to harmonize the realms of nature and spirit, Hegel shies away from the identification of consciousness with the body as a fundamental step for all human praxis, having great difficulty in neutralizing the antisocial character of human impulses. It is true that in the annex to Paragraph 1 of the Preface to the *Grundlinien* Hegel recognizes that body and soul constitute a unity, but there is not a single moment throughout the development of the system in which the assumption of the soul by the body truly occurs. This step ought to have been taken at the level of the subjective spirit, at the moment when the consciousness adopts a positive attitude when faced with otherness³³: no longer interested only in its independence and freedom, it is now convinced of the fact that it is all the world, and tries to be at peace with it. It is the level of observant reason, which faces nature as a mirror in which it sees itself reflected. In that journey through the different natural realms in search of its own being, the consciousness meets the organism. This is the moment which corresponds to the study of two sciences in which an attempt is made to establish the relation between spiritual individuality and its most immediate expression: Physiognomy and Phrenology. But having arrived at this point, reason takes a horrified step backwards, it cannot recognize itself either in its face or its skull, because it believes that its flesh and bones are only things and nothing more, so that neither identification with nature nor reconciliation with it are achieved³⁴. On the contrary, reason jumps to a new phase and tries to recognize itself in its activity, which seems more human to it than its own body. The final result of this stage is that the consciousness will end up identifying itself with its works and through the work it will place itself in contact with other individualities which give opinions on it and interpret it, thus arriving at the idea of spiritual objectivity: *die Sache selbst*, the work of all and every one. In this way, the consciousness, without passing through the body, is socialized, is an I converted into an Us, and this is the beginning of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*)³⁵. But in its blindness towards the natural world, reason has not been consumed in its universality. In truth, it is not reason, in its interior it remains split and that is

33 *Phänomenologie*, GW IX, 132–192.

34 *Phänomenologie*, GW IX, 171–192.

35 *Phänomenologie*, GW IX, 223.

why it will manipulate the world, it will instrumentalize it, it will make it its territory and property, as occurs in the first steps of the grounding of Right. This split reason, which, to make matters worse, falsely believes itself to be sovereign of itself and of the ambit which surrounds it, could have the same kinds of criticism applied to it which Hegel himself uses against understanding (*Verstand*) in his work *Faith and Knowledge*³⁶ – criticisms which have turned him into the true discoverer of instrumental reason.

Perhaps Feuerbach and the young Marx were not far wrong when they thought that the problem of the relation between theory and praxis in Hegel was related to the lack of integration between man and nature and that the way to solve it was to bring about the insertion of man in nature from corporality, making of him an incarnate being and, thanks to this, a total man, not an abstract man. Hegel's State only works well in theory but in practice it is totalitarian, because in reality it has been constructed by a reason which has not made itself flesh, an understanding which contemplates the world as a place of control and mastery.

However, this failure does not mean that the State model offered by Fichte has triumphed by any means. This has probably occurred for two reasons. On the one hand, Fichte's study of the material in general, of corporality, of the instinctive, of emotional and economic life, is still very precarious. With it Fichte only timidly opened up a new ambit which the following two centuries after him have taken it upon themselves to explore and develop thoroughly. On the other hand, the economic situation then prevalent made Fichte's thinking utopian. It was the insufficient degree of development of productive forces in the entire world that made it impossible to carry out the socialization of wealth through the State or the idea of a harmonious and non-repressive civilization. It is noticeable that once a higher level of wealth such as that found in highly-developed capitalism was achieved, another writer, Herbert Marcuse, developed similar ideas, realizing the unity of a tradition which he himself explicitly points out and which draws on Freud, Marx and Schiller.

36 *Glauben und Wissen*, GW IV, 319–322. See the article by V. López-Domínguez: »La storicità della ragione: Il caso di Fede e Sapere«, in *Hegelian* 27, Istituto degli Studi Filosofici, 106–119.

Fichte's Master/Slave Dialectic: The Untold Story

Arnold Farr

Introduction

Although Hegel has not suffered from marginalization in the history of philosophy as Fichte has, there is at least one feature of Hegel's philosophy that has recently received more attention than usual by Hegelians and non-Hegelians. In the context of recent democratic struggles, identity politics, multiculturalism and diversity initiatives many social/political theorists have turned to Hegel's theory of recognition and particularly the master/slave dialectic as a resource for grappling with these problems. This is an important move because the traditional liberal discourse on rights, equality, the dignity of persons, etc., have fallen short of providing us with an adequate interpretation of inequality, disrespect, oppression, severe repression, and ways in which so many of our fellow citizens have been refused the benefits of an advanced industrial society. The significance of the turn toward a theory of recognition cannot be overestimated.

It is no secret among students of German idealism that it is Fichte who initiates the move away from the traditional atomistic theory of rights and of the human person. Attention to Fichte's theory of recognition has been limited by and only discussed in Hegel's shadow. It seems that Hegel's master/slave dialectic, ignited by the struggle for recognition, is far more appealing and philosophically developed—and perhaps even more philosophically sophisticated—than Fichte's theory of recognition. Question: If one was to discover a tacit master/slave dialectic in the *Wissenschaftslehre* would this make Fichte a more serious interlocutor in discussions about

recognition? I cannot answer this question, but it seems that such a discourse would have much to gain from such a discovery. My claim in this paper is that there is a tacit master/slave dialectic in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Fichte's theory of recognition and the summons do provide us with an implicit master/slave dialectic that is as profound and interesting as Hegel's and at the end of the day might be more useful in light of contemporary social/political struggles.

I must digress for a moment to discuss the method of inquiry that I've employed.

The method is itself Fichtean to the extent that my focus is not limited to the letter of the *Wissenschaftslehre* but is more concerned with the spirit of such. Further, my method is consistent with that employed by twentieth century thinkers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Derrida. That is, any philosophical examination of a text demands that one sees not only what is said, but also what is unsaid. The necessary »unsaid« can be found in two places. First, it is the unmentioned assumptions that make possible what is said in the text. Every »said« is carried on the back of an invisible »unsaid«. Secondly, the »unsaid« is found in the possible future discourse made possible by the said. Every text points beyond itself toward a future discourse that is waiting to come to fruition.

There is significant similarity between Fichte and Hegel with regards to the role of recognition in terms of self-formative processes. However, there are also some very different implications for the theory of recognition. In the first part of this paper I will briefly retell Hegel's account of the master/slave dialectic; in the second I will examine Fichte's notion of the summons and disclose the implicit master/slave dialectic therein. In part three I will contrast the outcome of both theories of recognition and discuss the failures of both accounts.

1. Hegel, Fichte and the Location of Reason

Although many features of Hegel's master/slave dialectic seem fundamentally correct in terms of the development of human consciousness and social struggle, it seems to me that the larger context of Hegel's philosophy problematizes the form of the master/slave dialectic and his theory of recognition. That is, Fichte's theory of recognition and its implicit master/slave dialectic is developed within the framework of transcendent-

al idealism while Hegel's is constructed within a speculative or metaphysical framework of which I am a little suspicious. My purpose here is not to oppose the positions of Fichte and Hegel. Rather, my task is to work through a trajectory of thought provided by their systems. This trajectory of thought has as its impetus the desire for liberation, reconciliation, or—simply put—the founding of the Kingdom of God on earth. I do not have time to explore this notion of the Kingdom of God on earth here, suffice it to say that it merely refers to the overcoming of antagonism between human beings and it is the elimination of the master/slave form of human existence. It is a harmonizing of wills so that no individual seeks domination over another nor to be dominated by another.

Although I do not intend to launch Fichte and Hegel into a master/slave theory competition, I will show that both views have some limitations, and that at the end of the day Fichte's theory is worthy of much more attention than it has hitherto received. The key difference between Fichte and Hegel is the location and role of reason in the context of human life. Both Fichte's and Hegel's theories are developmental to the extent that they see the human species as progressing toward a Kingdom of God type of human existence. That is, both thinkers offer us a reformulation of Kant's Kingdom of Ends.

This Kingdom of Ends is produced by the activity of practical reason. The antagonistic relationship referred to as the master/slave relationship is symptomatic of the insufficient presence of reason. I speak of the insufficient presence of reason because it is reason that governs the struggle between individuals whereby the master/slave relation is produced and overcome in the moment of reconciliation. This initial demand for recognition is itself the work of reason.

We know that for Fichte and Hegel recognition involves the awareness of the presence of reason in another like one's self. Hence, it is necessary that we examine the location of reason for Fichte and Hegel. The purpose for this is to avoid confusion as we compare and contrast Fichte and Hegel with regards to recognition and the master/slave relationship. More precisely, there seems to be such ambiguity in Hegel that the moment one begins to discuss the place of reason in Hegel's system one's interlocutor may rightly ask »which Hegel?« That is, is one speaking of the secular Hegel or the Christian Hegel?

I will begin with the most charitable interpretation, that is, the view that is less vulnerable to my criticisms and closest to Fichte's view. On the

secular reading of Hegel, reason is located in every human individual. This reading makes Hegel appear a bit closer to Kant and Fichte than he perhaps is. However, this reason that is possessed by every human individual is not complete and it seeks further development and actualization in a reason outside of itself. In this sense reason is basically a type of desire, that is, a desire to be desired, a desire for recognition. As Chapters Four and Five of the *Phenomenology* shows us, the consciousness of rational beings goes through several inadequate shapes until it finally actualizes itself as Spirit. Spirit is the product of reason's struggle to harmonize itself with itself. That is, reason in its inadequate form in subject A is complete only when it is reconciled to, in harmony with, reason as it is manifest in subject B and so on. Hence, reason is fully present only as true community.

The Christian reading of Hegel is not necessarily contrary to the secular reading but it contains a few of extra ingredients that must be considered. In this context, Hegel's notion of reason seems to acquire its actualization within an eschatological framework. Indeed, only in such a framework can one speak of the end of philosophy and the end of history. Here reason seems to be something outside of the human individual which works in and through every human individual. Therefore, one can avoid getting bogged down by worries over intentionality, the moral correctness of war, prejudice, selfishness, and false consciousness and simply recognize the ways in which we all benefit from the cunning of reason. As Quentin Lauer observes:

Like the British economists with whom he was familiar, Hegel sees action which genuinely serves the self-interest of one as serving the interests of the community.«¹

As Lauer proceeds one detects a possible defense of Hegel. He writes: »The universality of the work is unconsciously produced, but in producing it the individual becomes conscious of the universality of his object, which demands sacrifice of mere singular selfness (or selfishness) for the sake of the whole.«²

Even the selfish acts of an individual are revealed as benefiting the whole. Hence, the individual comes to understand the universality of his

1 Quentin Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993), p. 178.

2 Ibid., p. 179.

work and is therefore inclined to transcend the narrowness of his own self-understanding.

My view is that the Christian reading of Hegel is the more accurate, at least, it must be taken seriously and dealt with in the context of Hegel's theory of recognition. It is also my view that Hegel's Christian eschatological vision is too naïve to address some important questions regarding recognition.

The location of reason in Fichte's philosophy is less ambiguous, more Kantian, and less bogged down by a questionable eschatological framework. On Fichte's account, every individual human *I* is a finite embodiment of reason. Unfortunately, Hegel and many of his commentators portray Fichte's view as less intersubjective than Hegel's. Following this view it is believed that Fichte's theory of recognition is weaker than Hegel's. Such a view is defended by Robert Williams. Williams argues that in the *Foundations of Natural Rights* recognition is replaced by coercion whereas Hegel leads us toward a possible moment of reconciliation. In the next sections I will try to show that embedded in Fichte's notion of the summons is the possibility for a counter-summons³ in one and the same act. It is possible for one to be called to freedom and slavery at the same time. Herein lies the struggle whereby something like a master/slave dialectic appears. The function of the state and coercion is to protect the freedom of the would-be victim of the master/slave struggle. Further, Fichte does envision a possible moment of reconciliation. In *Some Lectures Concerning the Vocation of the Scholar* Fichte sees the function of the state as self-destruction. That

3 In the original version of this paper which was given at a meeting of the North American Fichte Society in Philadelphia in the spring of 2004 I spoke of a contradictory summons. My use of the term »contradictory summons« was met with some disagreement by several of my colleagues. At that time I refused to alter my language believing that the term contradictory summons best expressed the point that I was trying to make. After much thought it occurred that my colleagues were right. There can be no contradictory summons. In my new formulation there is a summons which is immediately erased or denied by an anti-summons. In the original summons one is called into being as a human being by another human being but then rejected as a human being by being used as an object for the gratification of the other person. This new formulation is a more accurate description of what I was trying to express in Philadelphia. I owe a great deal of gratitude to my colleagues Jeffery Kinlaw, Violetta Waibel and Steven Hoeltzel for showing me the error of my ways.

is, the purpose of the state as well as the scholar is to cultivate humanity, to protect, and educate. A properly cultivated human race will be self-governed and no longer have any need for the state or coercion. However, the absence of a Christian eschatological framework makes Fichte less naïve about the outcome of our struggle. I will address this issue in more detail later when I examine a criticism of Fichte's theory of recognition and coercion developed first by Hegel and followed by Robert Williams.

2. *The Location of Struggle*

In Hegel's system the struggle for recognition seems to be a struggle between two individuals. It also seems to be the case that every individual must go through such a struggle and become, for a time, either master or slave. However, such an interpretation is contrary to Hegel's intention. Hegel's account is basically a hypothetical narrative, philosophical fiction, or heuristic device for explaining the way in which human beings are led from a very narrow and inadequate form of self-certainty to the truth (which is intersubjective or communal in nature). Hegel's narrative is very informative and is fundamentally right as an interpretation of the dynamics of human relationships and the development of human consciousness. However, I don't know anyone who would take such a narrative literally. Hence, we are in a position to de-stabilize, or even deconstruct some of Hegel's apparent assumptions. For example, the destabilization of Hegel's narrative would open the door for other versions of the master/slave dialectic and also remove it from Hegel's Christian eschatological framework. Further, we would be able to rethink the location of the negative moment in this narrative.

In Hegel's account the negative moment appears at the beginning of the struggle.

One human being encounters another and demands recognition. The two individuals engage in a struggle that produces the contradictory master/slave relationship. The individuals then go through various stages of development wherein the contradictory nature of their relationship is disclosed to them. These contradictions are dissolved as each individual recognizes himself in the other and therefore works toward reconciliation. Fichte, on the other hand, begins with recognition or a moment of unification and works toward the destruction of recognition which occurs when

one individual refuses to limit his/her freedom for the other. Hence, recognition entails the possibility of misrecognition wherein the other is not recognized as a human being but as an object for the use of another. Further, the summons to free activity that one person receives from another embodies the possibility of a anti-summons that is parasitic upon the summons.

3. *The Equiprimordial Summons to Freedom and to Slavery*

One of Fichte's most important contributions to German idealism is the notion that human beings receive their status as free rational agents with rights through a summons from another human being. The development of human consciousness is intersubjective. Fichte writes: »The human being (like all beings in general) becomes a human being only among human beings; and since the human being can be nothing other than a human being and would not exist at all if it were not this – it follows that, *if there are to be human beings at all, there must be more than one*. This is not an opinion that has been adopted arbitrarily, or based on previous experience or on other probable grounds; rather, it is a truth that can be rigorously demonstrated from the concept of the human being. As soon as one fully determines this concept, one is driven from the thought of an individual human being to the assumption of a second one, in order to be able to explain the first. Thus the concept of the human being is not the concept of an individual – for an individual human being is unthinkable – but rather the concept of a species.«⁴

He continues: »The summons to engage in free self-activity is what we call upbringing [*Erziehung*]. All individuals must be brought up to be human beings otherwise they would not be human beings.«⁵

We see here that it is impossible to think of the individual human being without thinking of the species. This implies that it is also impossible to understand the development of an individual or the self-formative process whereby a certain individual comes into being as a person without thinking about that individual in relation to others. The two abovementioned

4 J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, edited by Frederick Neuhouser, trans by Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 37–38.

5 *Ibid.*, 38.

passages entail two very important claims. The first is that the concept of the human individual is from the beginning a social concept. The second important claim is that although being human is to some degree the result of species membership, one is not just simply human. That is, one becomes human, free, rational through certain kinds of social, reciprocal, intersubjective processes.

To develop as a free, rational being requires certain social conditions. If these conditions (mutual recognition and the free choice to limit one's freedom for the other) are met, then the human beings involved have produced community. This is where the trouble begins. In Fichte's philosophy community is a regulative idea that would be the factual outcome if indeed all human beings agreed to limit their freedom for the other and thereby enter a state of mutual recognition. This regulative idea is also the yardstick whereby we are able to measure justice. Hence, it is possible that real community may not be actualized. Individuals (and I would argue entire social groups) may very well refuse to limit their freedom for others, thereby deciding to use others as a means to an end. Herein lies what seems to be a failure of recognition and the birth of oppression. Fichte's response to this potential problem is addressed by what I call the principle of forfeiture. That is, when one refuses to recognize the rights of another he or she forfeits his or her own rights thereby earning the right to be ejected from community. The violation of the rights of an individual instills in that individual the right of coercion. However, Fichte realizes that if left to the harmed individual the punishment may exceed the crime, therefore, he moves toward a theory of the state whose responsibility is to protect the rights of all and punish violators accordingly.

In their accounts of recognition, the summons, and the role of the state, Hegel and Fichte move too quickly to solutions to the problem of human disharmony, disunity, and oppression. Robert Williams has recently sided with Hegel in his criticism of Fichte's theory of recognition and the summons. In addition to Williams' two books on recognition I have in mind more specifically his article »The Displacement of Recognition by Coercion in Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts*«. According to the Williams/Hegel view, Fichte develops a theory of recognition and then replaces it with a theory of coercion thereby undermining recognition. Williams writes:

Fichte's account of mutual recognition subverts itself because individuals remain external to each other in spite of their relationship. Thus com-

munity is either impossible, or not genuine, exhibiting a system of forcible unions that both conceal and sanction coercion and oppression. Once separation is made basic, there is no longer any possibility of mutual relation and connection. »Rather, every connection is one of dominating and being dominated.«⁶

He continues: »Hegel diagnoses the fundamental contradiction in Fichte's account: The recognition argument is supposed to lead to ethical life and community; but the coercion argument and its underlying premise of metaphysical dualism render irrelevant or impossible the rebuilding of lost confidence and trust. The coercion argument undermines recognition and ethical life that recognition is supposed to generate.«⁷

There are three problems with the above claim. First, Williams fails to address the fact that in Fichte's theory community has a regulative function and the rights that are bestowed upon one in community are not necessarily stable. Second, the so-called contradictions in Fichte's theory may merely reflect the possibility of an anti-summons which is simply a part of the human condition. Williams is critical of Fichte's view that once one has been violated, confidence is lost and may never return. Hegel's vision of a moment of reconciliation is viewed as a more adequate solution to human antagonisms. Indeed, Williams—following Hegel—claims that the wounds of the spirit can heal. However, it is important here for us to remember Herbert Marcuse's response to such optimism when, in *Eros and Civilization*, he reminds us that the wounds of the spirit may heal but still leave scars.⁸ It is the scars left by the failure of recognition or a counter summons that I will address in the last part of this paper. Here, I want to briefly address the third Hegel/Williams criticism of Fichte which is that Fichte's theory of the state as a coercive force undermines his theory of recognition.

6 Robert Williams »The Displacement of Recognition by Coercion in Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts*« In *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, ed by Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2002). p. 60.

7 Ibid., p. 61.

8 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). P. 120.

4. *The Self-destructive Function of the State and the Possibility of Community*

In the above section I briefly discussed the Hegel/Williams criticism of Fichte's theory of coercion and the state. I also claimed earlier in this paper that the absence of a Christian eschatological framework made Fichte less naïve than Hegel about the outcome of the human struggle for mutual recognition. It is time to defend such claims against a legitimate concern Williams expresses. Williams is right to worry about the element of coercion in Fichte's theory and the possible outcome of such a theory. I agree with Williams that Fichte's theory of coercion seems to displace his theory of recognition and it also appears to advocate population control to the point of the erasure of what we take to be basic human rights. Further, Fichte seems to undermine the very possibility of community. Frankly, it would be better for us Fichte scholars if Fichte had never written Part Two of the *Foundations of Natural Right*. However, a defense of the spirit (not the letter) of Fichte's theory is possible.

I take Fichte's foray into a theory of coercion to reflect his very realistic understanding of human nature. By human nature I do not mean something that is fixed but merely a strong propensity toward egocentrism. The empirical, finite *I* does have a drive to be the absolute *I*. The daily experience of finitude, and the need for the other in order to achieve recognition does not eliminate the drive to be absolute. The act of freely limiting one's freedom for the other is not automatic. This claim should be evident on empirical and transcendental grounds. My purpose here is not to address Fichte's problematic presentation of the role of the state as a coercive force but to examine the spirit of his theory of the state within the context of an anti-summons.

It is not quite accurate to claim that the development of community plays a secondary role while the law is primary in Fichte's social/political philosophy. Community—not law or the state—is the end or *telos* of Fichte's theory. However, in Fichte's philosophy, community and all of the moments of reconciliation that make it possible do not inevitably fly in on the wings of *Geist*. In Fichte's theory there is no ghost in the machine and it is quite possible that human beings never achieve community. Herein lies a distinct difference between Fichte and Hegel. For Fichte, human beings *ought* to strive to achieve community. Hegel, from his earliest writings on Fichte to his last, rejected the idea of an *ought*. As problematic as Fichte's

theory of the state is, it is based on his recognition of our capacity to resist community even though we are all in need of recognition. Fichte's point is that if one person decides to enter community with others by limiting his/her freedom, then, that person and the other members of community should not have their rights violated by one who refuses to enter community. The state is set up as a mechanism for protecting the rights of individuals as well as the possibility of community.

The strongest defense of Fichte's serious attitude toward community is provided by Fichte himself. There is textual evidence that Fichte was aware of the problem of the co-existence of community and coercion. Indeed, for community to be achieved, coercion must cease to exist. Two passages from different texts make this point. In the *Foundations of Natural Right* Fichte writes: »Thus in the state, nature re-unites what she had previously separated when she produced several individuals. Reason is one, and it is exhibited in the sensible world also as one; humanity is a single organized and organizing whole of reason. Humanity was divided into several independent members; the natural institution of the state already cancels this independence provisionally and molds individual groups into a whole, until morality re-creates the entire species as one.«⁹

Likewise, in »Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation« he writes: »Despite what a very great man has said, life in the state is not one of man's absolute aims. The state is, instead, only a *means for establishing a perfect society*, a means which exists only under specific circumstances. Like all those human institutions which are mere means, the state aims at abolishing itself. *The goal of all government is to make government superfluous.*«¹⁰

In Hegel and Fichte, the purpose of the state is reconciliation. In Fichte's account the state must first use coercion merely for the sake of protecting the rights of those who voluntarily enter community by limiting their rights for the other. However, the state is not merely a coercive force. The Hegel/Williams criticism of Fichte omits the role of education or cultivation (*Bildung*) in Fichte's theory. The state is only a temporary mechanism that has as its goal its own demise. That is, the state is merely a

9 J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, p. 176.

10 J.G. Fichte, »Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation« In *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. By Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988). P. 156.

means to an end. The end, of course, is community. Nevertheless, we must remember that community is a regulative idea, an ideal that may not materialize since there are among us human beings who may have no interest in community and therefore refuse to limit their freedom for the sake of others. While community is an ideal, the real world of finite human beings is one of struggle, one of the summons and anti-summons.

5. Summons and Anti-Summons: Fichte's Master/Slave Dialectic

The purpose of this essay was to show that embedded in Fichte's philosophy is a master/slave dialectic similar to that found later in Hegel. However, my purpose is not to merely point out an isomorphism but to examine the merits of an alternative master/slave dialectic. The most problematic element in Fichte's political philosophy turns out to be one of its most important features. Fichte's theory of coercion is at once very idealistic (in the sense of optimistic) yet very realistic (in the sense of maintaining a bit of healthy pessimism). His optimism lies in his claim that the function of the state is to aid in the cultivation of humanity so that the eventual birth of community will make the state superfluous. His pessimism lies in his awareness that community is not an inevitable outcome of the flow of human history, indeed, as merely a regulative idea, community may never be actualized. The Fichtean and Hegelian view of community is based on recognition and reconciliation after recognition has failed. For Hegel, reconciliation seems inevitable. For Fichte this is not the case.

There is one area in Fichte's account that remains underdeveloped in comparison to Hegel's. Fichte explains the conditions for a master /slave relationship without ever producing the master/slave relationship. He moves too quickly to a theory of coercion which is designed to prohibit the development of a master/slave relationship. Fichte's theory is not complete because he moves to the solution before fully examining the problem, that is, the real existence of the master/slave relationship. Hegel's theory is inadequate because it is blinded by a Christian eschatological framework that makes it too optimistic to adequately address real master/slave relationships.

Although Fichte's philosophy is a transcendental one which does not look for its validity in the empirical realm, nevertheless, such a theory abstracts from the empirical realm. Therefore, such a theory can in some

ways be examined against the empirical. Further, although Fichte was a transcendental philosopher, I never claimed to be such. As one who is not engaged in a transcendental project, I have no problem oscillating between the transcendental and the empirical. Therefore, I will conclude by briefly reconstructing Fichte's unspoken master/slave dialectic and demonstrating its validity with an empirical example. I will then address an oversight in Fichte's theory.

I have discussed the role of the summons and the possibility of an anti-summons.

While the summons calls one into existence as a human being the anti-summons erases one's humanity. Fichte's view of the individual who refuses to limit his/her freedom for the other entails this insight. I recognize the humanity of the other when I recognize his/her freedom and I expect the other to limit his/her freedom for me. The problem occurs when I demand that the other limit his/her freedom indefinitely so that I can expand my realm of freedom indefinitely. I find myself engaged in the project of erasing the freedom of the other thereby, erasing his or her humanity. I have called the other into being as a human being only to transform him into an object for my use. I cannot erase the other's freedom without erasing his humanity. To erase his humanity I must first recognize it. Empirical examples of slavery, exploitation, alienation, marginalization, and dehumanization of various individuals and social groups validate Fichte's insight.

Examples of the process of dehumanization *via* an anti-summons from slavery include the prohibition against sexual or romantic relationships between whites and people of African descent, the prohibition against the education of slaves, and the debate over whether slaves should be converted to Christianity. With respect to converting slaves to Christianity, C. Eric Lincoln writes: »But the main objection to the spiritual enlightenment of the Blacks derived from the fear that a slave who became a Christian might somehow claim freedom on that account.«¹¹

Converting Blacks to Christianity would function as a summons to participate in the so-called freedom offered by this religion. Indeed, many converted slaves did use Christianity as a basis for their freedom struggle.

11 C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion and the Continuing American Dilemma*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999). p. 43.

Slave masters were diligent in their attempt to avoid introducing slaves to any kind of humanizing activity.

The making of a slave requires work and practice. The slave is not just simply there waiting for a master. Further, any attempt to make a slave out of a human being is met with great resistance. Therefore, the making of a slave requires the destruction of that which resists becoming a slave, the human. The very practices involved in making a slave suggest that the would-be-slave masters at some level recognize the humanity of the would-be-slave. History is replete with examples of the erasure of the humanity of one group by another. This erasure of humanity is possible only on the basis of the recognition of the humanity of the oppressed group. Fichte's and Hegel's theories of recognition are validated. The systematic erasure of the humanity of the slave requires recognition of the humanity of the slave. The master is caught in a performative contradiction. He has to first recognize the humanity of the slave if he is to deny the humanity of the slave.

6. Conclusion

For both Fichte and Hegel, there seems to be a natural tendency in human beings to attempt to dominate other human beings. They are both also aware of the contradictory nature of any attempt by one human being to dominate another. Their solutions are similar but distinct. For Hegel, antagonisms between individuals are resolved in a moment of reconciliation. However, Hegel is not naïve enough to believe that individuals will naturally recognize the error of their ways and seek reconciliation. Nevertheless, Hegel is naïve enough to believe that the State (which is the march of God on earth) will aid in the harmonizing of wills in a moment of reconciliation. Fichte, on the other hand, sees the state as a coercive force that will protect the freedom of those who choose to live in community by freely limiting their freedom for others. However, the state is not merely a coercive force, it is a transformative force that cultivates and educates individuals so that coercion will no longer be necessary.

There is one fatal flaw in both Fichte's and Hegel's accounts of the master /slave dialectic. They are both a bit too optimistic in their assumption that the state can be the agent of reconciliation or the restorer of rights. Indeed, such should be the function of the state but the state may also be the

agent of the anti-summons or the oppressive force whereby community is prohibited. Neither Fichte nor Hegel provides us with an analysis of the struggle for recognition between social groups. Allen Wood has brought attention to this problem in Hegel. He writes: »Hegel's argument shows that I cannot achieve self-certainty except as a member of a community of free persons who mutually recognize one another's rights. Hegel claims that in modern (post-Christian) society we regard all human beings as persons with rights, but his dialectic of recognition does not establish that self-certainty requires me to recognize everyone as a person. Consistently with Hegel's argument, I might find self-certainty in the parochial society constituted by a privileged race, caste, or class, whose members mutually recognize one another as persons to treat outsiders as nonpersons. Hegel's argument proves that I could not achieve self-certainty through my relations with these nonpersons; but if I have already achieved it through membership in my privileged group, I will have nothing to lose and perhaps much to gain from ignoring the supposed rights of those who do not belong to it.«¹²

If Wood is right, then there is no reason to believe that the master/slave relation has to end. The contradictions involved in the master/slave relationship do not undermine the master's need for recognition from someone like himself. The master can have the benefit of recognition and reap the »benefits« of enslaving another at the same time.

The question is, are we in any better shape with Fichte? The answer is yes and no. Fichte's theory does not help insofar as it does not provide us with an analysis of the struggle for recognition between social groups. However, a reformulation of Fichte's theory on the basis of his theoretical insights in the first part on the *Foundations of Natural Right* might point us in the right direction. There is no space here for such a reformulation or reconstruction, however, I can make a couple of brief suggestions.

At the center of Fichte's theory of rights is the regulative idea of community.

Community is produced when free individuals freely limit their freedom for others. Community is the result of the free coordination of activities by individuals. It is not necessary that an individual enter community

12 Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). p. 93.

with others. However, if that individual expects others to freely limit their activity in recognition of his rights, then he must do likewise. Of course, the individual may choose not to limit his freedom for others. In this case he has forfeited his own right to the protection of his freedom. Hence, he has chosen to not be a part of community.

Wood's criticism of Hegel also applies to Fichte to some degree. Fichte's notion of community is too vague to do the work that he requires. I take it that he uses the term community to refer to the human community in general.¹³ However, this is problematic to the extent that there is no state in general but rather various states representing various peoples. Further, individuals and groups can decide to violate the rights of certain human beings and form a state together that allows them to benefit from their recognition of each other while refusing to recognize those outside of their »community«. Racism is a perfect example of this. Racial difference makes it quite easy to construct an outsider/insider opposition between groups. On the basis of certain physical and cultural differences narratives are formed that attribute a greater degree of »humanity« to one group than it does to another. A sense of community and all of the protections that go along with it can be constructed for only one group at the expense of the other. The master/slave dialectic cannot be reduced to the struggle for recognition between individuals but it must include this struggle as it is played out between entire groups. If we apply the insights of Fichte's theory of rights, recognition, and his implicit master/slave dialectic to the struggle between groups, we would most definitely have to rethink Fichte's theory of the state. Part One of *Foundations of Natural Right* makes it possible to examine the master/slave dialectic without entering the problematic territory of Part Two. It is my suggestion that we revisit Part One of Fichte's text with an eye toward contemporary struggles for recognition and community between social groups.

13 One may retort that the vagueness of Fichte's concept of community is no problem since his project is a transcendental one and is not an attempt to describe anything empirical. However, transcendental philosophy abstracts from the content of experience. Therefore, we can always question the place where the philosopher stands as he abstracts since we do not abstract from nowhere. We may ask what kind of unspoken assumptions are being made about the human condition and human relationships as the philosopher begins his act of abstracting. My argument is that even transcendental philosophy can be tainted by one's empirical situation.

Fichte, Hegel, and the Senses of »Revelation«

Anthony N. Perovich Jr.

Emil Fackenheim wrote: »For Kant, revelation remains beyond the bounds of reason. His successors can philosophically comprehend Christianity only by either ignoring or denying its claims to revealed status. Hegel at once accepts the paradoxical revelation of God in Christ and dares comprehend it in philosophical thought.«¹

One's response to such a claim depends, of course, in part on how the idea of revelation is understood, for, particularly since the time of Fichte and Hegel, revelation has come to be interpreted in divergent ways. When we look at Fichte and Hegel we can see that some facets of what they say in regard to revelation point backwards, while others anticipate developments to come. Not only in the directions they point but also, contrary to one way of reading Fackenheim's remarks, in some of the things they have to say about revelation, Fichte and Hegel are not in fact opposed to one another but indeed display substantive similarities. Yet, while both Fichte and Hegel exhibit forward-looking conceptions of revelation, it is Hegel more than Fichte who connects his more modern conception of revelation with what Fackenheim refers to here as the »revelation of God in Christ.«

To talk about Fichte's and Hegel's views of revelation is to take the religious dimension of their thought seriously, or, rather, to presuppose that there is a religious dimension of their thought to be taken seriously. Fichte and Hegel themselves pretty clearly had a sincere belief that their philosophical positions were accurately characterized not only as religious, but as Christian, however implausible either one or both of those beliefs may seem to some readers. In any case, what follows does not defend these be-

1 Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1967), 231.

liefs or presuppositions but rather proceeds simply on the hopeful assumption that a case can be made for regarding both of them as genuinely religious thinkers.

It should also be noted at the outset that my treatment of texts is selective. Two places to which the study of Fichte's views on revelation would be expected to turn would be to his early critical treatise on revelation and to some of the posthumously published writings (such as the appendix to the *Sittenlehre* of 1812). Rather, I have chosen to focus on Fichte's doctrine of religion from 1806. There are several reasons for this, but one that will quickly become apparent is that I want to compare ways in which both Fichte's and Hegel's ideas embody what might be called Lessing's model of revelation. In any event, it should be noted at the outset that there are no pretenses of even a superficial comprehensiveness for what follows.

While there are some antecedents, focused discussions of revelation are relatively recent, dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Deist controversies of the period were responsible for the development of a sharp distinction between natural and revealed religion. Throughout this period revelation was understood according to what has been called the »propositional« model: what were revealed were statements, in particular the statements found in the books of sacred Scripture. Since that time the popularity of the propositional model has waned, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a number of alternative conceptions of revelation have been forthcoming. Fichte and Hegel, then, lived on the cusp of these developments, and it is unsurprising to discover aspects of their thought that point to the past along with others that point forward. At any rate, I shall suggest a shared enthusiasm for Lessing points the thought of both back toward this more traditional, propositional conception of revelation, while, as I noted earlier, anticipations of later positions are also clearly discernible.

Lessing's *Anti-Goeze*, the controversial writings in which Lessing attacked the Hamburg pastor's »bibliolatry« (to use the term he coined) and defended his publication of the *Wolfenbüttel Fragments* and the editorial comments that accompanied them, appeared serially in 1778. As a younger Fichte eagerly anticipated the appearance of each of the numbers and

read them so often that he had them memorized.² Fichte continued to have a high regard for Lessing, including him, along with Kant and Leibniz, on a list of »free thinkers« whom he admired in a letter to Reinhold from 1797.³ Thought about revelation during this period – and not just Fichte's – was, of course, deeply influenced by Lessing, whose *Education of the Human Race* contained the famous comparison between education for the individual and revelation for the human race (§ 1). Lessing continued to think of revelation, like other controversialists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in propositional terms, and, like the Deists, to think of religious truths in terms of rationally demonstrable propositions:

»Education gives man nothing which he could not also get from within himself; it gives him that which he could get from within himself, only quicker and more easily. In the same way too, revelation gives nothing to the human race which human reason could not arrive at on its own; only it has given, and still gives to it, the most important of these things sooner.«⁴

The understanding of revelation in terms of rationally demonstrable, that is, necessary, propositions, coupled with the fact that traditional orthodox support for the authoritative character of scriptural revelation rested on fulfilled prophecies and miracles, had earlier led Lessing to the famous »ugly, broad ditch« over which he could not leap, for the contingent, accidental truths of history (for example, the miracles, culminating in his resurrection, associated with Jesus) can never become the proofs of necessary truths of reason (among which he included religious truths, which, prior to their demonstration, constitute »revealed« truths on his understanding of revelation).⁵

Reminiscences of Lessing are to be found in Fichte's major mature work on religion, *The Way towards the Blessed Life*. Certainly the remark about his students that concludes the first lecture – »I ask them only to accept from me what they might doubtless have acquired for themselves independent of my help, but which I acquire with less labour and by a short-

2 *Fichte im Gespräch: Berichte seiner Zeitgenossen*, ed. Erich Fuchs (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1978), 1:16–17.

3 EPW, 421.

4 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), §4, 83.

5 *Ibid.*, 53.

er path.«⁶ – recalls the way we have just seen Lessing speak of education. It is Lessing's claim that historical truths are unable to ground religious truths of reason that is most frequently alleged to have influenced Fichte, above all the latter's claim that the »Metaphysical only, and not the Historical, can give us Blessedness; the latter can only give us understanding.«⁷ One need not maintain that Fichte and Lessing are making exactly the same claim here to observe that both insist on the current religious irrelevance of what each regards as in some sense historical: just as Lessing

6 J. G. Fichte, *The Way towards the Blessed Life*, in *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*, trans. William Smith, 4th ed. (London: Trübner, 1889), 311 (SW, 5:415).

7 Ibid., 392 (SW, 5:485). For claims of influence, see, e.g., Friedrich Traub, »Geschichtswahrheiten und Vernunftwahrheiten bei Lessing,« *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 1 (1920): 194: »Kant's saying that the historical can serve only for illustration, not for demonstration, and Fichte's dictum, 'Only the metaphysical, but by no means the historical, makes us blessed,' lie in the same line [as Lessing's statement]«; Emanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie*, vols. 5–9 of *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Hans M. Müller, Ulrich Barth, Albrecht Beutel, et al., 48 vols. (Waltrop: Hartmut Spenner Verlag, 2000) 8:386: »Fichte modifies Lessing's proposition, that accidental truths of history can never become the proof of eternal truths of reason, in his own way: 'Only the metaphysical, but by no means the historical, makes one blessed; the latter only makes one informed'«; Henry Chadwick, »Introduction« to *Lessing's Theological Writings*, 32: »Lessing's antithesis between the 'accidental truths of history' and the 'necessary truths of reason' foreshadows the language of German idealism. For Fichte (deeply influenced by Lessing), 'Only the metaphysical can save, never the historical'«; Henry A. Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966), 165–66: »Finally, it must be noted that the sharpness with which Lessing depicted this basic opposition between religious and historical truth has provided the starting point for all subsequent treatments of the subject. Here his influence may be discerned in thinkers as diverse as Fichte, who in the spirit of Lessing as well as Kant proclaimed: 'Only the metaphysical, and in no wise the historical brings salvation,' and Kierkegaard [...] and Bultmann [...]«; Avery Dulles, S. J., *Revelation Theology: A History* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 60: »Fichte's dictum, 'only the metaphysical can save, never the historical,' reflects the profound influence of Lessing upon him«; and Edith Düsing, »Sittliches Streben und religiöse Vereinigung. Untersuchungen zu Fichtes später Religionsphilosophie,« in *Religionsphilosophie und spekulative Theologie: Der Streit um die Göttliche Dinge (1799–1812)*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994), 119: »In the spirit of Lessing he explains that only 'the metaphysical, but in no way the historical,' makes one blessed [...]« Karl Barth points out correctly enough that Fichte's statement does not say the same thing that Lessing's does, but this does not detract from the plausibility of

finds himself bound to the »teachings of Christ« not by the historical elements of miracle and prophecy but by »these teachings themselves,«⁸ so Fichte is unimpressed with »the external evidence of Miracle, which, to us at least, proves nothing«; rather his doctrine, though in his view more or less identical with the »teachings of Christ« as reported by John, has »proved itself, and that with absolute evidence, – and it needs no further support.«⁹

Rather than a full comparison of Lessing and Fichte on historical and religious truths, I intend to focus on one proposition upon which the two pass superficially similar judgments, namely that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. The statement is a likely traditional candidate for a truth of revelation, as it is attested to by both Scripture and Creed. Yet both Lessing and Fichte hesitate to regard it as such. Even granting such miracles as the resurrection, Lessing refuses to grant that Jesus, to use the language of the Nicene Creed, is of one essence with the Father, and some of his remarks suggest that the reason for this is precisely because the resurrection, if true, is affirmed as a historical truth and the Incarnation, if true, is asserted as a religious one, that is, a necessary truth of reason.¹⁰ On the other hand, even though Lessing was prepared to admit that such characteristically Christian theses as the doctrine of the Trinity were necessary truths allowing of rational demonstration, other passages suggest that the nature of Jesus belongs alongside other claims which, if true, are mere truths of history: »Whether we can still *prove* this revival [i.e., the resurrection], these miracles, I put aside, as I leave on one side *who* the person of Christ was.«¹¹ Fichte is more explicit in affirming the historical nature of the claim: »that in Jesus Christ, for the first time, and in a way predicable of no other man, the eternal Ex-istence [*Daseyn*] of God has assumed a human personality [...] is a merely historical, and not in any way a metaphysical proposition.«¹² Thus it might be thought that for both the doctrine of the Incarnation fails to be a matter of revelation because it expresses a merely

Lessing's influence on Fichte's formulation; see Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1973), 253.

8 *Lessing's Philosophical Writings*, 55.

9 *Blessed Life*, 382 (SW, 5:476–77).

10 *Lessing's Philosophical Writings*, 54.

11 *Ibid.*, 92 (§ 59).

12 *Blessed Life*, 401 (SW, 5:567).

historical proposition. The facts of the case, however, are somewhat more complicated.

The reason why Lessing hesitates to pronounce on the person of Christ seems fairly straightforward: he simply did not think that Jesus was »more than a mere man,« as he puts it in unfavorably comparing »the Christian religion,« that is, institutional Christianity, to »the religion of Christ,« the religion recognized and practiced by Jesus and which he holds in common with all other human beings.¹³ Christ's supposed divine status may once have served the purpose, like miracles, of securing the acceptance of his teaching, but all these matters are irrelevant now that we recognize the truth of those teachings.¹⁴ Fichte recognized precisely the same justification for insisting on the divine nature of Christ, although, unlike Lessing, he believes that Jesus made this claim on his own behalf.¹⁵ Fichte in fact, like Lessing in effect, regards the claim as merely historical and religiously irrelevant.

Yet Fichte is also prepared to read the statement in the Prologue to John's Gospel, that the Word was with God and the Word was God, as concerning the »Revelation and Manifestation [*Offenbarung und Manifestation*]« of God. He is further prepared to say that Christ was »the Absolute Reason clothed in immediate Self-consciousness,« that »God was Jesus and manifested himself as Jesus,« and that Jesus came by the knowledge of this »purely through Inspiration.«¹⁶ This requires that we examine Fichte's view of Christ a bit more closely.

According to Fichte, Jesus was the first to possess the knowledge that everything is grounded in God. He did not base this knowledge on inference, as does the philosopher: his knowledge rested on what can appropriately be called »inspiration.«¹⁷ It is knowledge that Dominick Schmidig, quoting Fichte in my view out of context but nevertheless accurately, terms »inner revelation.«¹⁸ Such knowledge is not what Fichte describes as his-

13 *Lessing's Theological Writings*, 106.

14 *Ibid.*, 92.

15 *Blessed Life*, 397 (SW, 5:489).

16 *Ibid.*, 406, 408, 406 (SW 5:572, 573, 571). These claims certainly invite comparison with what Spinoza has to say about Jesus in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

17 *Ibid.*, 406 (SW, 5:571–72).

18 Dominik Schmidig, »Vom Intersubjektiv-Werden Gottes nach J. G. Fichte,« *Fichte-Studien* (1995), 8:158.

torical, although the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the first to attain to this knowledge *is* historical. The knowledge that Jesus possessed was propositional and satisfied the criteria of revelation stated by Lessing: it contains nothing that human reason cannot attain on its own, but it is given to the human race sooner than reason was in fact able to attain it. It is because Jesus had this knowledge without the benefit of rational derivation and was the first to have it that Fichte says the many things about him that look, when considered out of context, like an affirmation of the doctrine of the Incarnation. They are not that, but they are an affirmation of a revelation connected with Jesus, a revelation understood in propositional terms and indeed as Lessing understood it.

As noted at the outset, however, the propositional model of revelation has lost much of its popularity in the last two centuries, leading one Protestant theologian to maintain, »No proposition would gain wider acceptance than the following one: the *content* of revelation is not a body of propositions to be accepted as the condition of faith.«¹⁹ Alternative conceptions of revelation have arisen in the past two centuries, and useful typologies have been constructed,²⁰ at least of those models most frequently encountered in twentieth century theology. One of those, the so-called »historical model,« seems to me closest to identifying the kinds of cases which the term »revelation« in one of its central Fichtean uses is frequently called on to designate.

In his 1954 Bampton Lectures, John Baillie observed, »We have said that it is not enough to think of God as giving us information by communication, but that we must rather think of Him as giving Himself to us in communion. Two things are implied in this. With the first [...] there appears a remarkable breadth of agreement in recent discussions about revelation. It is that what is fundamentally revealed is God Himself, not propositions about God. Equally remarkable, however, is the recent agreement on the second, which is this: that God reveals Himself *in action* – in the gracious activity by which He invades the field of human experience and human

19 Ray L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 80 (quoted in Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of Revelation*, 2nd ed. [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992], 48).

20 Dulles's *Models of Revelation* is one example.

history which is otherwise but a vain show, empty and drained of meaning.«²¹

Of course, in more orthodox Christian theology the actions in which God reveals himself are those events, such as the Exodus and the Resurrection, recounted in the Bible and thought to constitute part of the history of salvation. Obviously, the actions revealing God for Fichte are more wide-ranging than these, although we have already seen that he is prepared to grant that God manifested Himself in Jesus. Fichte has an expansive conception of revelation, but it can also be narrowed down to get at the sense I wish to connect with the »historical model.« Broadly speaking, »Fichte can call the whole of knowledge ›revelation,‹ for revelation is only another word for ›appearance.‹ Usually, however, ›revelation‹ means to him *inconceivable content entering into form*.«²² When God or Being acts through us, breaking into the world of consciousness and cognition, revelation occurs.

Thus, we are to look, as Baillie suggested, for God to reveal Himself, and for Him to do so in action, but not merely in the actions of a Christ, or, better, we must not look for the revelatory actions of a Christ only in Jesus. As Christoph Asmuth says of what he terms »universal Christians,« »In their essence, that is, beyond their empirical individuality, in their in-itself, human beings are themselves the presence [*Dasein*] and the revelation of God, they are themselves Christ.«²³ We find the transition to such revelatory actions in the third of the five stages that mark the spiritual growth of the individual in *The Way towards the Blessed Life*, the stage Fichte calls »Higher Morality.« In the level of »Lower Morality,« the level of Kantian/Stoic legalism, God's breaking into the world is obstructed by the autonomy of the I and its self-legislation; what leads to the »Higher Morality« is the resignation of our personal will, allowing God to work in the world through us, a transformation that Düsing has aptly character-

21 John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 49–50.

22 Emanuel Hirsch, *Christentum und Geschichte in Fichtes Philosophie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1920), 21.

23 Christoph Asmuth, *Begreifen des Unbegreiflichen: Philosophie und Religion bei Johann Gottlieb Fichte 1800–1806* (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1999), 145.

ized as the shift from autonomous to »theonomous« morality.²⁴ The incomprehensibility of God prevents us from knowing *a priori* »how this Being will disclose itself; [...] it can only be *immediately* perceived and experienced, and only apprehended in the act of its living forth-flowing from Being into Ex-istence [*Dasein*]; so [...] the specific knowledge of this new and Super-sensuous World cannot be communicated, by means of description and characterization, to those who do not themselves live therein. He who is inspired of God reveals to us how it is; – and it is as he reveals it, just for this reason – because *He* so reveals it; but without such inward revelation no man can speak of it.«²⁵

With the entrance into the Higher Morality comes a recognition of a higher vocation, for once we have denied our personal wills, not only does the Divine Nature manifest itself in us, but does so in a unique way for each of us,²⁶ being true to which is our higher calling. This higher vocation leads to an as it were individualized revelation of God through the actions of the person who has yielded to the Divine: »This Higher Vocation of Man, which, as we said, penetrates him with complete and undivided Love, exhibits itself indeed, in the first place, in his own conduct; but in the second place, and by means of that conduct, it likewise manifests itself in a determinate result in the World of Sense.«²⁷

Only the manifestation of God is valued for itself, so actions – our own or others' – are valued only insofar as God is recognized as revealing Himself through them. Thus revelation in Fichte looks not only backward, by taking up ideas from Lessing that are tied to an older model of revelation as propositional, but also forward, insofar as for Fichte what is revealed is not propositions about God but God Himself, and He is revealed in actions. Since, as Hirsch has pointed out, of all those since the Reformation it is Fichte who most relentlessly broadened the notion of revelation,²⁸ we should not at all be surprised at the wealth of revelatory loci: art, the domination of nature, politics, and science are examples of the realms where

24 Düsing, »Sittliches Streben und religiöse Vereinigung,« 111.

25 *Blessed Life*, 447 (SW, 5:525).

26 *Ibid.*, 454 (SW, 5:531).

27 *Ibid.*, 457 (SW, 5:533).

28 Emanuel Hirsch, *Die idealistische Philosophie und das Christentum* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1926), 64.

we may look to find the Divine manifesting itself.²⁹ In all these areas and more, God is revealed in the actions of the theonomous individual.

When we turn to Hegel, we do not find the »relentless« extension of the concept of revelation that Hirsch attributes to Fichte in any way diminished: according to Hegel, »Spirit that does not manifest or reveal itself is something dead,«³⁰ and indeed the very meaning of the word »Spirit« implies, in his view, God's revelation.³¹ While the notion of revelation can thus be understood to be of very wide application in Hegel's philosophy, I propose to explore his use of it in contexts parallel to those just discussed in Fichte. What we find are not only some interesting resemblances of doctrine, but also a similar Janus-faced approach to revelation, both looking back toward the propositional model as well as forward to the historical model.

Like Fichte, Hegel, too, was something of a devotee of Lessing. In an early letter Schelling refers to Hegel as »an intimate of Lessing's,«³² and the influence seems to have extended to the idea of revelation. Jaeschke writes: »Philosophy can indeed take as its starting point contents with which it is presented historically or on the basis of authority. It must, however, change these contents into the form of the concept [...]. This conception of Hegel's [...] could also be formulated in terms of § 72 of Lessing's *Education of the Human Race*: We can marvel at the truths of religion as revelations only until such time as reason teaches us to deduce them from »its other established truths« and combine them with them. However much it may differ

29 *Blessed Life*, 448–9 (SW, 5:526).

30 G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Volume One: Introduction and the Concept of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart, with the assistance of J. P. Fitzer and H. S. Harris (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1984), 176 (G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*, ed. Walter Jaeschke [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983], 3:85).

31 G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 298 (§ 564) (G. W. F. Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. Hermann Glockner [Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag, 1961], 10:453).

32 Schelling to Hegel, February 4, 1795; see *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 32.

in execution, this is precisely what Hegel's interpretation of Christianity seeks to achieve.«³³

Rather than discuss the truths of religion in general, I shall focus on matters related to the Incarnation as done previously in the discussion of Fichte's relation to Lessing on the question of revelation. Speculatively expressed, the truth of religion connected with the Incarnation is very similar for Fichte as for Hegel. To be sure, the relation of the truth to Jesus is somewhat different for the two: for Fichte, this truth is something known by Jesus, and Jesus is significant for him solely because of what he knows and because he was the first to know it; for Hegel, the truth is something represented by Jesus, and it is not because of what he knows but because of what he represents that Jesus is a significant figure. The content of the truth, however, is quite comparable in the two cases: for Fichte, what Jesus offered was an »insight into the absolute unity of the human existence with the Divine«;³⁴ according to Hegel, what is attained through the Incarnation is »the certainty of unity with God, that the human is the immediately present God.«³⁵

As we have seen, however, for Fichte the form of this knowledge does not change in the transition from revelation to philosophical result; the difference that makes the principle of unity revelation in one case and philosophical result in the other is the contrast between the »mode and manner of this knowledge in Jesus Christ« and »the mode and manner in which the speculative philosopher arrives at the same knowledge.«³⁶ For Hegel, the fact that philosophy and religion in their ultimate expressions are identical in content while being different in form means that Hegel's appropriation of Lessing will be somewhat different from Fichte's. If it is correct to hold that Hegel »did not believe in the Incarnation in the ordin-

33 Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. J. Michael Stewart and Peter G. Hodgson (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 289.

34 *Blessed Life*, 390 (SW, 5:483).

35 G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Volume Three: The Consummate Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart, with the assistance of H. S. Harris (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1985), 326 (G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*, ed. Walter Jaeschke [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1985], 5:250).

36 *Blessed Life*, 404 (SW, 5:570).

any sense, since ultimately Jesus is not God in any sense in which all other men are not,«³⁷ then the form in which this doctrine is expressed at the level of representation is certainly not going to be identical with the way it is expressed at the conceptual level. At the level of representation the identity of Jesus and God is affirmed, and it is only at the philosophical level that the truth of this identity is recognized as »the universal incarnation of Spirit,«³⁸ as affirming the identity of God with all finite human spirits. (The discussion here sidesteps the fact that the uniqueness of Christ is still preserved in Hegel's speculative re-enactment of Christianity; see, for example, the *Encyclopedia*, § 569.)

If, following Lessing, we call »revelation« the bare statement of a religious truth prior to the explanation that enables us to appreciate its philosophical necessity, then in this particular case Fichte and Hegel are going to differ over what they regard as the relevant revelation, even though they basically agree about the statement of philosophical truth whose content is being revealed. For both, that content is the unity of the human and the Divine, however differently those terms may be understood. For Fichte, revelation here is a proposition of exactly the same form and content, but which, in the case of Jesus, is known neither through speculation nor through tradition, but simply »as part of his own existence, [...] purely through Inspiration.«³⁹ For Hegel, however, the revelation is a proposition identical in content but different in form, a proposition affirming the identity of Jesus Christ with God. For Fichte, who does not employ here the distinction between the representational form of the truths of absolute religion and the conceptual form of the truths of absolute philosophy, the proposition that for Hegel counts as revelation, that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God, is for Fichte merely historical.⁴⁰

However, despite this difference, in keeping with the shared lineage of Lessing in both these cases we are speaking of revelation in propositional terms. What Jesus knew by »inspiration,« for Fichte, what is expressed by the doctrine of the Incarnation in Christianity, for Hegel, are in both cases truths that admit of propositional statement. Thus, there is a sense in

37 Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 209.

38 Raymond Keith Williamson, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 171.

39 *Blessed Life*, 406 (SW, 5:571).

40 *Ibid.*, 388 (SW, 5:482).

which, even in their mature religious writings, both Fichte and Hegel maintain a more traditional or retrospective sense of revelation, one that sees revelation in terms of propositions.

I suggested above that Fichte also presents a more forward-looking sense of revelation, when he views the conduct of the person who has denied his own will and yielded to God's as a revelation of the Divine. Unsurprisingly, Hegel also strongly exhibits this understanding of revelation in his philosophy.

In the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel states: »Christianity says, God has revealed himself through Christ, his only-begotten Son. Ordinary thinking straightaway interprets this statement to mean that Christ is only the organ of this revelation, as if what is revealed in this manner were something other than the source of the revelation. But, in truth, this statement properly means that God has revealed that his nature consists in having a Son, i.e. in making a distinction within himself, making himself finite, but in his difference remaining in communion with himself, beholding and revealing himself in the Son, and that by this unity with the Son, by this being-for-himself in the Other, he is absolute mind or spirit; so that the Son is not the mere organ of the revelation but is himself the content of the revelation.«⁴¹

This may plausibly be rephrased as stating that what is revealed in Christ is not simply some truth being transmitted by Jesus, but God Himself.

Of course, God is not revealed only in Jesus. When Quentin Lauer asks, »In how many ways does God reveal himself in his activity?« he tellingly responds, »The answer to the question reads like a description of Hegel's ›system‹ of philosophy.«⁴² Lauer provides a useful overview, according to which God reveals himself creating finite minds that ascend to infinite being, in nature, in historical events, in revelation more traditionally understood as the words of prophets and other inspired writers, and finally in the Incarnate Word.⁴³ Of greatest relevance to the question of the ways in which Hegel's idea of revelation makes contact with some more recent senses of revelation is the connection of revelation to God's acting in his-

41 *Philosophy of Mind*, 17 (§ 383, Zusatz) (*Sämtliche Werke*, 10:34–35).

42 Quentin Lauer, S.J., *Hegel's Conception of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 268.

43 *Ibid.*, 268–72.

tory. It is the thesis of Hegel's philosophy of history that »God governs the world; the actual working of his government – the carrying out of his plan – is the History of the World.«⁴⁴ Hegel frequently adapts the traditional language of divine providence to give a religious description of this teleological development of history, but he also freely adopts the language of divine activity, as when he speaks of »that which [Spirit] had previously achieved in the world of action.«⁴⁵ Thus, later theologians looking for antecedents of the claims that what God reveals is God Himself, and that He reveals Himself through his actions in the world, can certainly find them in the Hegelian texts.

Indeed, it is to Hegel that notable proponents of the idea of »revelation as history« point as their forebear: Pannenberg, to take a prominent example, specifically identifies Hegel as the first to give systematic expression to the idea that revelation is God's self-revelation and that God reveals himself through His activity in history.⁴⁶ It is certainly true to say that Pannenberg's characterization of revelation corresponds more closely to the forward-looking aspects of Hegel's account than of Fichte's. For example, Pannenberg's conception of history as understood only from its end and the appreciation of Jesus as the central revelation of God in that history are both very Hegelian. One can hardly suggest that the appearance of Jesus has the same revelatory significance for Fichte as it does for Hegel or for Pannenberg. For Fichte, Jesus' connection with revelation is wholly with the backward looking, propositional sense: Jesus was the first to possess knowledge of the unity between the human and the Divine. For both Hegel and Pannenberg, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are

44 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), 36 (*Sämtliche Werke*, XI, 67).

45 Ibid., 307 (*Sämtliche Werke*, XI, 396: »was er vorher praktisch vollführt hat.«).

46 Wolfhart Pannenberg, »Introduction« to *Revelation as History*, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg, trans. David Granskou (London: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 4 and 16. – Cf. James M. Robinson, »Revelation as Word and History,« in *Theology as History, New Frontiers in Theology*, vol. 3, 62: »Pannenberg points out that the Enlightenment destroyed the concept of revelation as involving revealed truths, but that Hegel redefined the term as the revelation of God's own person.« On Pannenberg's relation to Hegel, see, e.g., Rolf Ahlers, »Theory of God and Theological Method,« *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* (1983), 22:235–40 and Roger E. Olson, »The Human Self-Realization of God: Hegelian Elements in Pannenberg's Christology,« *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (1986), 13:207–23.

revelatory in the forward looking sense that through these God has revealed himself in history. It is this connection of revelation properly understood with what Pannenberg terms »the Christ event« that makes him see Hegel as his ultimate source: »The strictly defined concept of revelation as the self-revelation of the absolute appears to have been first introduced by Hegel, for with him it became clear for the first time that the full self-manifestation of God can only be a unique one. Hegel expressly reserved the designation »a revealed and revealing religion« for Christianity, not because it contains truths that have been transmitted by supernatural means, but because, in distinction from all other religions, it rests on full disclosure of the nature of the absolute as spirit.«⁴⁷

Thus, while for Hegel as for Pannenberg God's revelation in history culminates in his revelation in Jesus, for Fichte the former revelation must be clearly distinguished from the latter. For Hegel, God's revelation in Jesus is His ultimate historical revelation, that is to say, for Hegel the notion of revelation as history finds its highest expression in the Incarnation. For Fichte, on the other hand, revelation as historical action is not focused in any way on Jesus; the relation of Jesus to revelation is for him understood in propositional terms. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the central idea, that in revelation God reveals his very essence, is already fully present in Fichte's thought, even if the Christocentric emphasis is missing. It is undeniable that, for Fichte, God discloses his essence in his actions: »What is it that assumes a Form? Answer: – Being, as it is in itself, without any change whatever of its inward Essential Nature: – this must be borne in mind. But what then is there in Ex-istence? Answer: – Nothing else than the One, Eternal and Unchangeable Being, besides which there can be nothing.«⁴⁸ But God reveals Himself in this fashion already at the level of the Higher Morality, in those events through which »Wisdom and Science, Legislation and Culture, Art, and all else we possess of Good and Venerable [have] been introduced into the world,«⁴⁹ and all this can be appreciated without any reference to Jesus; what is added at the level of Religion – and it is Jesus who represents the Religious level – is knowledge, not the rationally derived knowledge of the philosopher but the inspired knowledge of the results of what Fichte calls Science. That knowledge is propos-

47 Pannenberg, »Introduction,« 4.

48 *Blessed Life*, 428 (SW, 5:509).

49 *Ibid.*, 374 (SW, 5:469–70).

itional, known by both Jesus and the philosopher, although their modes of access to it differ. Thus for Hegel, God's disclosure through Jesus looks forward to the historical model of revelation, whereas insofar as Jesus offers an instance of revelation for Fichte, it is revelation understood in terms of the propositional model. In this sense, Hegel is forward-looking in a way that Fichte is not. Nevertheless, if we distinguish revelation understood as the idea of God revealing himself through his actions from revelation understood as the idea of God revealing himself through »the Christ event,« we will certainly see Fichte as a representative of one key strand of an important modern sense of revelation.

It seems fair to say, then, that the language and the idea of revelation are familiar from both Fichte's and Hegel's works, and that, while the usage of the term for and notion of revelation is so expansive in Fichte and Hegel that it will never map easily onto the conception as it appears in more orthodox Christian theology, for both revelation can be understood in both backward-looking and progressive senses. In accord with ideas of Lessing, whom both admired, one finds a notion of revelation that is more in keeping with the propositional interpretation familiar in the prior two centuries. Both, however, also insist that what is revealed by God is God Himself, and that He is revealed in His actions. For both Fichte and Hegel these actions are simultaneously the actions of human beings, in whom God is working. This reading of revelation is significantly similar to one of the alternatives that has developed in the period since the heyday of German Idealism, and it is one way in which that philosophy, in its Fichtean as well as its Hegelian form, has looked forward to more recent theological reflection and provided in some sense a valuable anticipation of it, for, as Pannenberg winningly remarks, »to locate a theological thought in German idealism is not automatically to condemn it.«⁵⁰

50 Pannenberg, »Introduction,« 5.

Fichte's Anti-Hegelian Legacy

Matthew C. Altman

Traditionally, Fichte has been interpreted either as a wayward Kantian or as a mere stepping stone in the emergence of speculative idealism. Recent scholarship has done little to correct this appraisal. Most positive assessments of Fichte's contribution explain how he emphasizes important Kantian themes or how the *Wissenschaftslehre* is an embryonic form of the Hegelian science, but neither approach explains why Fichte should be studied by those who are not particularly interested in the history of German idealism – especially those working on such perennial topics as the sources of normativity, the scope and limits of human freedom, and the role of the nonrational in the formation of the subject, topics about which Fichte has much to say.

In the broadest terms, transcendental idealism is based on the notion that there is no way of simply being held by something independently of how we relate ourselves to it. As rational beings, we constrain ourselves on the basis of reasons. However, Fichte claims that autonomous self-determination is necessarily in tension with a limit that ultimately resists rational incorporation. Consciousness is constitutively self-alienating, and irreducibly so. The subject strives for an absolute self-possession that it can never achieve. Although Hegel criticizes this paradoxical position as a sign of the *Wissenschaftslehre*'s failure, much of contemporary Continental philosophy has rejected Hegel's attempt to domesticate the subject's limits in a teleological narrative.¹ In light of these rejections, Fichte's account of

1 For the purposes of this paper, I leave aside the question as to whether Hegel in fact conceives of Absolute Knowing as a historical point when the other has been completely rationally incorporated. Some recent interpreters of Hegel argue that this common interpretation fundamentally mischaracterizes the Hegelian project. For example, see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Conscious-*

subjectivity seems prescient: the nonrational is at the heart of human consciousness. His treatment of an original limit to the I's activity thus marks an important development in the move away from rational self-sufficiency as a complete account of finite subjectivity, and it provides a historical touchstone for understanding our post-Nietzschean ambivalence toward the Hegelian project.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* is notoriously opaque, and given its aspirations to be a complete philosophical system, the task of setting out specific Fichtean themes is all the more difficult when one does not have the luxury of a book-length exposition. However, Fichte's starting point is clear enough. Like many of Kant's successors, Fichte contends that the dualisms left by the critical philosophy – between the understanding and sensibility, freedom and necessity, subject and object – can only be overcome by deriving each element from an absolutely first principle. And he argues that there are only two consistent explanatory possibilities from which to choose: either the subject determines the object («idealism» or «criticism») or the object determines the subject («realism» or «dogmatism»).

Critics disagree about how Fichte establishes the truth of idealism – whether he mounts an argument based on spontaneity as a condition for the possibility of experience, or whether our capacity for self-determination is immediately recognized as a matter of practical faith.² However, no

ness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and J. M. Fritzman, »Return to Hegel,« *Continental Philosophy Review* 34, no. 3 (Sept. 2001): 287–320. Whether the »real« Hegel is subject to the criticisms commonly leveled against him by post-Nietzschean Continental philosophers is irrelevant to the claims that are made here. These philosophers position themselves against a particular kind of philosophizing that they identify with Hegel. I claim only that, in this dissatisfaction, they have Fichte as a historical forbear.

- 2 Among others, Peter Baumanns, Daniel Breazeale, and Robert Pippin claim that the *Wissenschaftslehre* rules out dogmatism and establishes the truth of idealism by appealing to spontaneity as a condition for the possibility of experience. See Baumanns, *Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre. Probleme ihres Anfangs* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974), 126; Breazeale, »How to Make an Idealist: Fichte's »Refutation of Dogmatism« and the Problem of the Starting Point of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,« *Philosophical Forum* 19, nos. 2/3 (winter 1987/spring 1988): 104; and Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 46. I have argued elsewhere that Fichte supports idealism primarily by appealing to our immediate consciousness of moral constraint. See Matthew C. Altman, »Idealism Is the Only Possible Philosophy: Systematicity and the Fichtean Fact of Reason,« *Idealist-*

one disagrees about his conclusion: only idealism can account for my immediate awareness (or »intellectual intuition«) of myself as an autonomous being. The I posits itself as an I through an absolutely free, founding act (*Tathandlung*), and everything that subsequently binds me must ultimately be the result of my own free activity. Of course, as a finite subject, my freedom is limited. Objects confront me independently of my will, and I must accommodate the (sometimes) opposing wills of others. Kant can explain sensible intuition by appealing to the world absolutely apart from our way of considering it (the thing in itself), but Fichte has no such recourse; the thing in itself is a remnant of dogmatism. Instead, the distinction between subject and object can only result from the I's positing the objects of its thought in opposition to the spontaneity of thinking. In other words, the absolutely free being must take these things to be external to its willing, or must posit a »not-I.«

This leaves an obvious question unanswered: How does Fichte reconcile the seemingly unbridgeable gap between absolute self-activity and finite subjectivity, given that nothing inherent in the *Tathandlung* seems to necessitate such a limitation? In short, *why* does the I posit things in opposition to itself? To explain the source of objectivity, Fichte claims that a feeling (*Gefühl*) in the I prompts it to posit the not-I. The I feels a resistance to its freedom and conceives of this resistance as a thing external to its activity, an object that confronts the subject. We thus become conscious of ourselves as particular agents by reflecting on a felt limit to our freedom. Feeling is »a condition for the possibility of consciousness [*Bedingung des Bewußtseins*]« because it makes possible the predicable content of consciousness – the apperceptive subject versus the objects of inner and outer sense, or what it is aware of.³

But this only pushes the question back. If the I is the source of whatever constrains it, and if feeling necessitates an act of self-limitation,

ic Studies 31, no. 1 (winter 2001): 1–30.

3 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo: Kollegnachschrift K. Chr. Fr. Krause 1798/99*, ed. Erich Fuchs (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982), hereafter abbreviated *WLnm[K]*, p. 165; Fichte: *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), hereafter abbreviated *FTP*, p. 330. Citations to Fichte's writings refer first to the volume and/or page number in the appropriate German edition, then to the English translation.

doesn't the I also have to be the source of this feeling – to necessitate itself, as it were? If so, this would still fail to explain why the I imposes this feeling on itself. The question is simply rephrased: not »Why does the I restrict its absolutely free activity?« but »Why does the I give rise to a feeling that prompts it to restrict itself?« To resolve this problem and yet account for the feeling of resistance, Fichte conceives of the I as originally limited: »limitation too must be originally present, and it is just as original as the pure will itself.«⁴ If feeling affects the I's activity, it must be part of the I. Otherwise, the objects that confront the subject could not be completely explained in terms of the I's activity, as everything must be under idealism.

In order to explain finite subjectivity, then, Fichte requires an explanatory element that disrupts the *Tathandlung*. Although the presence of feeling in the I is »dependent upon freedom« insofar as »I must surrender myself to the feeling,«⁵ it is also the case that absolute freedom is made determinable by a limit for which the I is not responsible: »The I cannot conjure up feelings in itself.«⁶ Feeling is recognized as a nonposited condition of finite subjectivity *and*, consistent with idealism, the I's activity is recognized as the source of the limit to its own autonomy. Feeling is neither fully interior nor fully exterior to the will. Instead, it is the result both of an original limit that the I confronts as a given in consciousness and of the I's positing it as a limitation for the I.

In the practical part of the *Grundlage* of 1794, Fichte describes this original limit as an *Anstoß*, a check on thinking that is »unposited by the positing I.« And it is here, with an original limit that is not a self-limiting, that Fichte appeals to the given as a necessary impetus to determinacy: »The check [*Anstoß*] (unposited by the positing I) occurs to the I insofar as it is active, and is thus only a check insofar as there is activity in the I; its possibility is conditional upon the I's activity: no activity of the I, no check.

4 *WLnM*[K], p. 163; *FTP*, p. 325.

5 *WLnM*[K], p. 99; *FTP*, p. 220–21.

6 *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte, eight vols. (Berlin: Viet and Co., 1845–46); rpt., along with the three vols. of *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes nachgelassene Werke* (Bonn: Adolphus-Marcus, 1834–35), as *Fichtes Werke* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), hereafter abbreviated as *SW*, *SW* I, p. 306; *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), hereafter abbreviated as *SK*, p. 268. In quotations from the Heath-Lachs translation of the *Grundlage*, »self« has been replaced with the more appropriate and more commonly used »I«.

Conversely, the activity of the I's own self-determining would be conditioned by [*bedingen durch*] the check: no check, no self-determination.«⁷

The I is passive insofar as it is given the task of limiting itself, but it is active insofar as it must posit this limit as a constraint on its own activity. The I conditions the check and is conditioned by the check. There can be no absolutely external cause of the check (a thing in itself), for this would amount to dogmatism. Rather, the I's confrontation with the *Anstoß* is an encounter with a limit that is as original to the I as pure activity. Even though the *Anstoß* is in the I, it is not reducible to the I. It is the necessary otherness that makes selfhood possible, the source of the I's consciousness of itself as a subject.

Determinacy is possible only on the condition of a self-consciousness whereby the I reflects on its activity as that of a particular subject. But as we have seen, a condition of such reflection is the I's limiting itself, which requires an impetus to act – a givenness – that prompts the I to posit the object in opposition to the subject. In the *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796) and the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (1796/99), Fichte describes this limit in terms of the I's confrontation with other sources of free activity. The I's capacity for rational self-determination is qualified by a summons (*Aufforderung*) from the other. When the I attempts to express its freedom without restriction, other rational beings resist incorporation by the I. They assert themselves as ends who cannot be used simply as means. From this, the I infers – rightly, because »this summons can be explained only by referring to a free acting outside of me« – that the other is also a rational being.⁸ The *Aufforderung* obligates the I to determine itself as a particular subject within a limited sphere of acting, and this forms the basis of a relation of right among agents.

This kind of check on the I's activity marks a deep division between Kant's Enlightenment project and the fragmentation of the subject that Fichte initiates. For Kant the rational subject confronts other rational subjects, but for Fichte this passivity in the face of the other makes the rational subject possible in the first place. I become a subject when my rational activity is resisted by a non-self-positing – and therefore nonrational – limit to that activity: »If the external being had not exercised its efficacy and

7 SW I, p. 212; SK, p. 191.

8 *WLnm*[K], p. 231; *FTP*, p. 453.

thus had not summoned the subject to exercise its efficacy, then the subject itself would not have exercised its efficacy. The subject's activity as such is conditioned by [*bedingen durch*] the activity of the being outside it.«⁹

Just as the absolute I limits its freedom when checked by the *Anstoß*, here the I is summoned to restrict itself out of respect for other agents. There is some critical debate about how Fichte relates these two ideas (the *Anstoß* and the *Aufforderung*),¹⁰ but of primary philosophical importance is Fichte's claim that the I constitutes itself as a subject by confronting something – a bare check or another consciousness – that stands as an other to pure activity. In both cases, the I's founding moment is disrupted by a limit that resists rational incorporation.

As a subject, I am autonomous when I act in accordance with the formal conditions of rational willing. This is straight out of Kant. However, my activity is also conditional upon a nonrational given that cannot be rationally redeemed. Absolutely free activity makes pure self-determination possible, but the *Anstoß* undermines this as a possibility. As a consequence, the finite subject strives for a complete self-sufficiency that can never be

9 SW III, p. 41; Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, trans. Michael Baur, ed. Frederick Neuhouser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 39–40.

10 How the *Anstoß* and the *Aufforderung* are related in Fichte depends a great deal on how much continuity one sees between the *Grundlage* of 1794, in which the *Anstoß* is prevalent, and the *Grundlage des Naturrechts* and *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, in which he emphasizes the *Aufforderung*. Daniel Breazeale claims that the summons is a kind of *Anstoß*. Slavoj Žižek agrees, but says that the *Aufforderung* is the primary case of the I's limit by the absolute other. By contrast, Robert R. Williams claims that the two are only functionally identical in constituting the I as a limited subject. He distinguishes the other I, which does serve »as a kind of ethical *Anstoß*« for Fichte, from the summons, which, because it does not necessitate the I to act, is not an *Anstoß*. See Breazeale, »Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self,« in *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 97–98; Breazeale, »Fichte's Abstract Realism,« in *The Emergence of German Idealism*, ed. Michael Baur and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, vol. 34 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 103–4; Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 44; and Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 36–37.

achieved. While the drive to be autonomous manifests itself in finite subjects as a capacity to deliberate about and determine the content of their motives, they cannot but act on the presumption that they are imperfectly rational. Finite subjects are thus constrained by the moral law as an imperative: I ought to act in a way that is consistent with the I's pure activity, that is not determined by something that is external to the I. Yet as a finite being, I am confronted by force in me that is opposed to autonomous self-determination. This is the fate of beings who are constitutively self-alienating: they must strive to achieve the impossible – a purely rational activity.¹¹ A few important and related themes are evident even in this brief description of Fichte's theory of subjectivity. First, anything that exists for the I is the result of an act of self-determination. This is the crux of idealism: things are not simply given to us without the work of judgment on our part, and things do not bind us in our practical lives unless we adopt them as our ends. However, rational self-determination is not pure and unbounded. We must limit ourselves in response to a nonrational check on our activity. What results, then, is a freedom that is self-undermining. As rational beings, we are absolutely autonomous, such that any pure or natural ground of the will reflects a self-determined principle of acting. But the choice between such principles are only available to us on the condition of a conflict between the rational and the nonrational, or an original limit on the I's activity. The source of this limit is posited as a thing distinguishable from my free activity; but, in being posited by me, its existence as an other depends on and is necessarily related to that activity: »This fact, that the finite spirit must necessarily posit something absolute outside itself (a thing-in-itself), and yet must recognize, from the other side, that the latter exists only *for it* (as a necessary noumenon), is that circle which it is able to extend into infinity, but can never escape. for it is indeed the aforesaid circle which alone confines us and makes us finite beings...«¹²

11 See *SW IV*, pp. 296–97; Johann Gottlieb Fichte, »Some Lectures concerning the Scholar's Vocation,« in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 149; and *WLn[m/K]*, pp. 145, 227; *FTP*, pp. 295, 447.

12 *SW I*, p. 281; *SK*, p. 247.

The thing that opposes the I's activity both conditions and is conditioned by that very activity. Thus Fichte can only give a systematic account of a fractured self; his system can only be a system of disunity.

Hegel's criticism of Fichte's philosophy as a form of subjectivism is well-known, and it has influenced interpretations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to the present day. According to Hegel, Fichte's introduction of an »original limit« within the I reinscribes the subject-object opposition rather than determinately negating the distance between the knower and the known. The subject must undertake an endless striving to overcome this opposition, but no ultimate synthesis is possible. The Fichtean subject remains imperfectly rational; or, more properly, the nonrational necessarily conditions rational self-sufficiency. This deficiency marks the *Wissenschaftslehre* as an incomplete stage in *Geist's* historical experience of itself and its achievement of absolute self-consciousness.

Hegel's criticism of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is not inaccurate. The opposition that Hegel claims to be ultimately synthesized is, for the Fichtean subject, perceived as an unending interplay – an »oscillation [*Schweben*]« of the imagination – between the dual aspects of human existence, between the rationally self-determined and the nonrational given.¹³ The negative for Hegel is always only a lack that is ultimately overcome, but for Fichte, the autonomy of pure reason is repeatedly and necessarily opposed by the *Anstoß* or the *Aufforderung*.

Recent criticisms of speculative idealism, however, should prompt us to reevaluate Fichte's philosophy, particularly his claim that the I is constitutively self-alienating. The totalizing impulse that dominates Hegel's idealism, the attempt to redeem any opposition with a higher synthesis, has been variously linked with totalitarianism (Adorno), the privileging of the present (Derrida), the domestication of the other (Lyotard, Irigaray, and Levinas), and the obsessive pursuit of rational self-identity against a material and fragmented subjectivity (Lacan, Kristeva, Deleuze, and Foucault). Hegel's contention that the self is lost in its limit and is only rediscovered by overcoming this opposition commits a kind of violence against the other and, in doing so, masks the extent to which the self is irrevocably conditioned and defined by its limit. By contrast, for Fichte the very unin-

13 See SW I, p. 243; SK, p. 215; and *WLnM[K]*, pp. 60, 182–83; *FTP*, pp. 160–61, 360–61.

corporability of the check or summons makes possible the I's existence as a subject.

Alienation is a central theme in the history of Western philosophy, and it is certainly not unique to Fichte. Plato claims that we spend most of our lives distracted by the world of the senses, Augustine says that we are fallen beings as a result of original sin, and Hegel describes the history of our imperfect attempts to stand behind our actions on the basis of reasons. But we can learn to contemplate the forms if we are properly educated, or can be redeemed through Christ's crucifixion, or can understand our failures as part of a teleological narrative culminating in Absolute Knowing. Fichte distinguishes himself from such thinkers by arguing for the irrecurability of constitutive self-alienation. The circling between the given conditions of subjectivity and the self-determination of the given, or the oscillation of the imagination in trying to reconcile the I and not-I as opposites, can never be resolved.

Neither Kant nor Hegel can accommodate this conception of subjectivity. Kant's attempt to rationalize the subject *qua* agent and to link this rationality to absolute autonomy is inverted in Fichte: we are nonrational in our rationality, and unfree in our freedom. The subject's fundamental unity is not rediscovered through this splitting and self-separation, as it is with Hegel, for whom the negation of autonomy is itself negated. Rather, in psychoanalytic terms appropriate to Fichte, we live at the juncture between the unconscious and the ego-ideal, such that we are necessarily alienated from the given and from the pure I, despite our constant striving – through therapy, or through philosophy – to reconcile the opposites and attain an absolute self-identity.

This idea of a necessarily self-alienated subjectivity preoccupies much of contemporary Continental thought, both in its rejection of the Hegelian project and its corresponding emphasis on the fragmentation of the self. Relative to different traditions, Continental philosophers variously interpret the other that resists rational incorporation, but Fichte's fundamental insight remains intact. For Fichte, as soon as the question of the I is raised, the question of the other is raised as well; the I implies immediately an original limit and the subsequent distinction between the rational subject and the nonrational given. Similarly, in the phenomenological tradition, for example, Husserl's transcendental Ego cannot be reduced to its ownness without immediately delimiting the other as such (*das Fremde*),

which always exceeds the Ego's intentional consciousness.¹⁴ Heidegger develops this idea further. The factuality of the fact of *Da-sein's* being – what Heidegger calls *Da-sein's* »facticity« – is conditioned by a feeling of givenness, through which *Da-sein* initially understands itself ontologically: »Da-sein understands itself – and that means also its being-in-the-world – ontologically in terms of *those* beings and their being which it itself is *not*, but which it encounters ›within‹ its world.«¹⁵ *Da-sein* is thrown into a world that is not posited by its own way of being; rather, its way of being is defined by how *Da-sein* responds to this givenness, including death. More recently, Levinas claims that subjectivity is inaugurated with an extreme passivity (in the face of the other) that is already an ethical responding, a summons on behalf of the other who cannot be reduced to merely another thing in the subject's consciousness. This emphasis on the nonrational at the heart of subjectivity also appears outside of European phenomenology: Nietzsche on ascetic ideals as the basis of morality, Lacan on the phantasmic construction of psychic unity, and Butler on the largely un-

14 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, in *Husserliana*, vol. 1, ed. Stephan Strasser (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1950), §44. With regard to the Ego's relationship with the other as an alter-Ego (rather than simply *das Fremde* in general), the relationship between Husserl and Fichte is much more complicated. Husserl develops an account of intersubjectivity, such that the Ego of the other is not accomplished through (objectifying) intentionality. Ultimately, the other can only be achieved through a common world, which is constituted by the Ego as essentially shared by different experiencers, different Egos. By contrast, for Fichte, subjectivity itself, and thus the possibility of positing such a shared world, is conditional upon an initial confrontation with another I through the *Aufforderung*.

15 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of »Sein und Zeit«*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 55. Although Fichte and Heidegger share this fundamental insight, it should be noted that their philosophical orientations and aims are directly opposed: Fichte's distinction between realism and idealism still depends on a metaphysical dualism and on understanding the essence of the I as its existence. Nonetheless, in Heidegger's lectures on German idealism, he privileges Fichte's philosophy as a metaphysics of *Da-sein* – that is, an »indirect hermeneutic of facticity« (*Der deutsche Idealismus [Fichte, Schelling, Hegel] und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart*, ed. Claudius Strube, vol. 28 of *Gesamtausgabe* [Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1997], 366; translation mine). In Heideggerian terms, Fichte's description of the I's »essence« as a self-positing seems to conceive of the I as a place where *Da-sein* exists and is claimed by Being, rather than as a being whose essence (construed metaphysically) is existence.

conscious attachment to gender norms that undergird the performance of masculinity and femininity. In the work of these and many other philosophers, we see the reemergence of what is essentially a Fichtean idea.

In retrospect, then, what looks to Hegel like a failed attempt at an absolute synthesis actually foreshadows the Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean dissatisfaction with a certain kind of idealism, and particularly with the Hegelian enterprise. To this extent, Fichte's work on the limits inherent to subjectivity are worth exploring further, not only to understand the historical beginnings of some of the themes that now dominate Continental thought, but, ironically, as a rejection of the idealist's attempt to establish rational identity through a denial of the otherness of the other.

**»Philosophy on the Track of Freedom«
or »Systematizing Systemlessness«:
Novalis's Reflections on the
Wissenschaftslehre, 1795–1796**

Michael G. Vater

In notes that have become known as the *Fichte Studies*, Friedrich von Hardenberg closely documented his intellectual journey through the 1794/95 *Grundlage*. The notes, some of them developed pieces of philosophical reflection, others mere jottings, attempt to both personally and philosophically reassemble the themes and vocabulary of Fichte's first grand exposition of *Wissenschaftslehre*. Recent translation of the studies into English and an upsurge in scholarly interest in the early Jena Romantics on the part of literary theorists and philosophers alike occasion this look at the young Novalis's reception of Fichte. While Jane Kneller and Manfred Frank have offered readings of the fragments that highlight the themes of the mediated character of representation, the endless nature of reflection, and the indefinite freedom that arises from the »free renunciation of the absolute« (FS, xvi), I think they underestimate the seriousness of the young critic's attempt to think the foundations of an absolute theory of consciousness *with Fichte*. Fichte himself struggled with the indefinite character of his project, the elusive character of its elements and language, the never-ending task of supporting the hypothetical synthesis of limited I and not-I by freely undertaken analysis. Novalis was not so much diverging from a finished and formulaic »absolute« that Fichte offers – as if the *Grundlage*'s first principle statically captures the evanescent nature of the act that underlies and supports all consciousness – but launching with Fichte into the almost self-undermining project of attempting to *think* that one act by transforming it through infinite dissection into an endless

series of component acts and their partial syntheses (FTP 84). Expressed in fragments as striking such as: »Unending free activity arises in us through the free renunciation of the absolute – the only possible absolute that can be given us and that we only find through our inability to attain and know an absolute« (FS #566) and »An authentic philosophical system must systematize freedom and unendingness, or, to express it more strikingly, it must systematize systemlessness« (FS #[648]).

Novalis's train of thought lands him close to the paradoxical conclusions that Fichte reaches in the *nova methodo* lectures, where the initial postulation of an abstract self-reverting activity as a support for self-consciousness ends in the dispersed world of plural centers of consciousness as will, each a sensibly embodied I summoned to free action within social constraints (FTP, 119–120, 465; cp. FS #567). The embodied subject freely interacting with other free agents in a common sensible world seems to be a radically different endpoint for philosophical reflection than the ›completed system‹ that Fichte promised in his 1794 prospectus (Concept, EPW 113–119). Both Fichte and Novalis arrive at that point through working on – and working *within* – the limits of reflection.

1. *Fichte in the Fichte Studies*

It is difficult to get any sense of Novalis's struggle with Fichtean conceptions without a patient reading through of *Fichte Studies*. He is contending with ideas and facts, with the critical philosopher's awareness of the limitations of theory and with the poet's sense of the fragile purchase of words on things. Fichte's text is rarely addressed. It is not a matter of excerpts or sketches for developed critiques. The critic is working on the matter, instead, on the fundamental lists of words that Fichte uses to indicate isolate and, as it were, freeze the underlying self-reverting activity. Where Fichte finds a single ›self-reversion‹, however, Novalis finds doubling, reversal and inversion, everywhere he looks. If Fichte somewhat problematically employs a term lifted from anthropology, e.g., *feeling*, to designate a phase of the ontological process, Novalis tends to liberate words from stable referents, to release them into a play of change and exchange, and finally to obliterate the anchorage of terms in any stable designation.

This process of reversion and inversion can be seen in the first group of fragments. While Novalis explores the grand themes of *feeling*, *reflection* and *life* in his early meditations – showing himself the acute reader of the *Grundlage*, following not the logic of its deductions and principles, but the thematic guidance of its severed parts – his initial comments on consciousness display a sense of the shiftiness and luminescence of the domain of knowledge, and of the arbitrary way that words or signs designate by hovering over and hollowing out things, as it were:

»Consciousness is a being outside of being that is within being.

But what is that?

What is outside being must not be a proper being.

An improper being outside being is an image – Consciousness is consequently an image of being within being.

A better explanation of the image. /Sign/ Theory of signs. / Theory of presentation, i.e., of not-being, within being, in order to let being be there for itself in a certain respect (FS #2).«

We have all the elements here for a theory of expression as well as for a theory of consciousness. What reflects does not reproduce; the sign designates because signifier is not signified; the ›there for itself‹ function of image, presentation, or word arises from the loosening or disjoining of being in sign. One thing is put in place of an other, which it is *not*. Consciousness, the reader of signs, lives in the distance between the two, and is both author and decipherer of the ever shuffling substitution between them – or is consciousness itself nothing but the shuffle?

Novalis clearly sees this line of thought is vertiginous, that reference disappears in the game of intersubstitution if the *not* of not-being is the core. The *not* is just a little hook on which to hang everything, and on which nothing can depend – »it just grasps a handful of darkness.« It must inhere in something, the ultimate *something*, life. But if word and thing rest in this third, then life escapes the grasp of sign. From the start, philosophy is doomed, for it is compelled to try to say the unsayable. Philosophy can

only aim at its object, not get there; we sense the ground by *feeling the limit* that circumscribes us. We are not transcendent, but know only »in the I and for the I.« If philosophy is to do anything, then, it must operate poetically, turn from its object to the crafting of an image, and in the image discern the object it cannot see: »In order to conceive itself the I must represent to itself another like itself, anatomize, as it were. This other being that is like the I is none other than the I itself. The I similarly becomes aware of this act of alienation and respective production only through this same conceptual exercise –It finds that it is the same in its own case, that the act that precedes this reflection can occur in no other way« (FS #3).

The philosopher's abstraction-reflection is the poet's creation, mirroring in an other. Novalis instinctively sees Fichte's difficulty with locating his subject-matter and making a beginning: the *intellectual intuition* or sense of sense which is to be the foundation and tool of *Wissenschaftslehre* is never absent but never-present in a unitary and sufficient way. It is said to be, supposed to be an intuition of self-activity, but self-activity is never given as such, nor completely represented as enacted. It must be glimpsed, says Fichte, in the mirror of our moral life, in the self-activity I *ought* to be, rather than the external parade of sensory states that I am (Second Introduction, SK 38–41). I must construct myself, *fictionalize* myself, to be who I am and see who I am.

Novalis's instinct, however, is to recoil before the image of endless distorted self-imaging, or the journey ever onward to an I that never fully active or self-realized. –Much of this recoil may be explicable from the standpoint of the poet's life: as Sophie's health fails, Friedrich's courage fails. Moments of despair interrupt the march of thought like stabs of pain. –As thinker and critic, however, Novalis opts for an aesthetic eternity, available in the moment, and rejects the long-march of Fichte's elongated moral striving. Near the end of the *Studies*, in passages of unusual clarity, he sees the situation this way: we are, in part, self-determining freedom, and the I has a greater purchase on activity the more it creatively transforms what is given, the present world. We are to actively put the world *under* us – a task of endlessly postponed fulfillment. »Our [creative] power gets as much free play as it has world *under* it. But since our *nature*, or the fullness of our being is unending, we can never reach this goal *in time*.«

But evidently the poet thinks delayed gratification is one thing, but endlessly delayed satisfaction of the drive for knowledge another. He invokes a metaphysical solution, rejects the rule of time and process, buys out of Fichte's infinite moral quest, and in a Faustian move declares the moment eternalized and infinite satisfaction gained. Continues Novalis, »– But since we are also in a sphere outside time, we must reach it [the goal] there in every moment, or, better, if we want, in this sphere we are able to be pure simple substance. /Here is morality and peace of mind, because an endless striving after what lies ever out of reach before us seems unbearable/« (FS #[647]).

Simple substance is certainly ›endless striving‹ pacified, but by what right can the thinker dissolve the tension between doing and being, between simply acting and being in a state, that Fichte's approach to philosophy brings with it?

One answer is, of course, that there are more voices in the *Studies* than those of Fichte and Novalis. Spinoza is present, and the critic employs his cosmological triad of ›God, Nature, and I‹ in several contexts, all of which suggest an endlessly vital or dynamic ground of being that is partially embodied in and viewed through separate but opposed finite domains. In one fascinating but cryptic fragment, Novalis translates Fichte's view of the I into this Spinozistic theology: »Our nature is immanent – our reflection [is] transcendent. We *are* God – we think as individuals. If transcendence becomes immanence, it is the idea of divinity –that is, if representation becomes intuition, then we are in the realm of the divine I –Imagination, as intuition, is God. Feeling is nature – Understanding is the person – personified psychology.« (FS #218)¹

This fascinating passage shows the philosophical perils of the idealist-romantic dialogue. If one can permit oneself to slip away from the dynam-

1 The Spinozistic triad of God, Nature, and I was part of Novalis's vocabulary from the start of the *Fichte Studies*. Remarks 142–152 show a sustained attempt to employ that language. The poet's most striking remark in that regard is: » Spinoza ascended as far as nature – Fichte to the I, or the person. I ascend to the thesis God.« Perhaps this portends the mystic theology of later fragments – »We shall understand the world when we understand ourselves, because we and it are integral halves. We are God's children, divine seeds. One day we shall be what our Father is« (*Logological Fragments*, PW 61) –and of *Hymns to the Night*. See also FS #'s 71 and 303.

ic, self-constructive or transcendental psychological mode of Fichte's thinking, ›dogmatism‹ is already at the door and the way is at hand to dissolve all of Fichte's insoluble problems – the unrepresentability of act or agility as such, the simply categorical lag between action and reflection, production and recognition, or the nobility and the frustration of the unrealizable moral project of making all *id* into *ego*. One forgets that one crafted the image of another self solely to understand and see oneself. No longer is one looking into a mirror, then, but simply staring at a map of the heavens. Fichte was notoriously impatient with Schelling for thinking that a dogmatic or critical approach to truth was an indifferent ›lifestyle‹ choice.

2. *Playing with Words: Kant's Categories and a Theory of Signs*

Perhaps the most surprising thing about Novalis's reflections on Fichte is his freedom from the latter's precision in vocabulary and argument. Where the philosopher deduces, the poet plays. Indeed sometimes he just plays with words, turning them inside out, interchanging them, running through lists of roots and prefixes while remarking on the philosophical power of the German tongue (cf. FS #s 342, 363). Most of the critic's intellectual playfulness, however, is reserved for his constant mulling over the chestnut of Kantian philosophy, the origin and interrelations of the categories. Novalis's first thoughts on the categories, inspired as much by Fichte as by Kant's slim comments, suggest that they are thought experiments undertaken in intellectual intuition (FS #23) or modes of combining form and matter in the I in such a way that the familiar thesis, antithesis, synthesis pattern emerges. In addition, Novalis claims that the dynamic categories of relation and modality are the ground of the formal ones of quality and quantity, with the thesis of the formal ones (unity, reality) corresponding to the synthesis of the dynamic ones (reciprocity, and necessity) (FS #28). The influence of Fichte's vocabulary is evident in such constructions, and the world-picture of the *Wissenschaftslehre* seems to be vindicated: ›reality‹ is the sphere of appearances generated by contrary activities, operating under necessary laws, producing a uniform texture of objectivity for the limited I. Novalis attempts, for instance, to vindicate Kant's famously undeduced twelve categories in a Fichtean, i.e., binary and dynamic way. The categories of quality are figured as modes of the

concept, determined by the interworkings of concept and intuition; those of relation are accounted modes of feeling, determined by the interweaving of feeling and reflection, while the modal categories are viewed as the forms of sensation, arising from the dance of concept and sensation (FS #297). Novalis does employ contrasting pairs of the *elements* of knowledge in this attempt to derive the categories, but they are material factors, not mere rules or schemata. The reader can become suspicious that either the critic is attempting to derive the formal from the material—a category mistake about the categories—or, worse yet, that these terms are being bandied about in almost arbitrary fashion, any term being able to function in the place of any other, depending on context and starting point (see FS #'s 599 and 641). The writer seems astoundingly far from understanding the categories who can pen these notes on the same page: »Categories – original properties of a noumenon« (FS #575) and »Kantian categories are merely for accidental substance« (FS #[564]).

I can at best hazard a guess about Novalis's penchant for wordplay in lieu of deduction. Directly after an attempt to derive the Kantian twelve from modifications of modality – surely the most abstract interpretation possible – Novalis writes: »Principles of algebra applied to metaphysics« (FS #600). This of course suggests that there are necessary laws or algorithms at play, expressing a contrast between two fundamental values or qualities – and that would fit nicely with all of the critic's inversions of categories or transformations of opposites, one into the other. But it might also suggest that the fundamental values or qualities are themselves *variables*, and that an indefinite range of contrasting elements might be specified as the values of these variables. Algebraic metaphysics, then, might mean *endless intersubstitutability*, as in a Leibnizean universe of monadic mirrors, each of whose being is a function of the distortions of the perceptions of all others. This would make being chaotic and representation (or sign) arbitrary – exactly what Novalis suggests in a long passage where, investigating the interrelations between time, space, and matter, the critic from time to time steps back, observes his procedures and voices the following meta-comment and questions:

»It is as impossible to think of space without time as it is to think of intuition without a representation . /Time is the form of space in the imagination/

Why dichotomous oppositions everywhere?
 /Everything is recognizable through opposition/
 /An image is a represented intuition.
 A sign is an intuited representation./
 /Symbolic formative power [*Bildungskraft*]. Imagination./
 What are representation and intuition?
 /There is no absolute form, and no absolute material [*Stoff*].

They all condition each other alternatively in the circle.« (FS # 226)

What does this mean? In a Fichtean world, I might suggest, things arise as appearances – or illusions – floating on a bed of activities that we can sometimes understand as opposed, refractory and mutually limiting, and we can at other times understand as one activity, but can never understand as *simultaneously one and self-opposed*. Novalis comes to some clarity about this later in the fragments, when he is working on the important doctrine of the momentary fact-event and the two opposite roles it can play, state (*Zustand*) and object (*Gegenstand*) or sensation and impression: »Every thing, like every ground, is relative. It is a thing insofar as it is opposed to a thing. Only the whole is *real*. – A thing would only be absolutely real if it was not again a *constituent*. The whole rests more or less – like a game in which people sit on each other's knees in a circular fashion without a chair.« (FS #445)

A thoroughgoing relativity and intersubstitutability reigns in Novalis's world of appearance, yet interconnection through the power of the *not* – the distinction, opposition, exclusion, or semantic contrast that forms the world of representation (sign, image, word) – keeps the parts connected, keep being open to *imagination*: the power of unification.

At the foundation of this world picture are ideas borrowed from Kant (schema) and Fichte (free activity as self-determination). Novalis brings them together in a dense passage early in the *Studies* on the theory of signs. Signification – meaningful interchange or intersubstitution, generative of the relation »standing for« – happens when one signifying agent freely or arbitrarily forms a relation between ›sign‹ and something ›signified‹. But this relationship can be communicated to a second signifying agent only if there is some structure or necessity, first, to the relationship itself and, secondly, to the way it is conveyed. The necessary element enters in the material or sensible character of the sign, which is the constant in the communication between the two signifying agents (FS #12, pp. 7–8).

How can the sensible sign, supposing that its materiality means that it stays the same and appears in the same way to both signifiers, secure communication of an arbitrarily chosen meaning to a second signifiers? Some signs must be natural or involve a homology between sign and signified; Novalis does not elaborate, but one might think of imitation, which might give way to gesture, which in turn might give way to pointing, and so on. That would be the material side of the relationship, which Novalis quickly treats. More interesting to him are the immaterial conditions of communication, first, that the first signifying agent *freely determine* herself and her world in the act of signification, and second, that there is some general sort of *schema* available for the mapping of the conceptual onto the sensible and vice versa (FS #12, pp. 9–10). I am not sure whether this account of conditions, material and immaterial, supplies an adequate account of the nature of sign and signification. It is similar, however, to the account of human interpersonality that Fichte supplies in early in the *Foundations of Natural Right* to support the social-political *Ur*-phenomenon of recognition (FNR 53–79). Only if somehow the presence of the immaterial can be manifested in the material and yet understood by another immaterial being, can the taking-the-other-as-conscious gesture of mutuality between humans be initiated; similarly, only if what is meant is shown in what is not meant, the material sign, can what is meant be communicated. The process of signification is that of ciphering and deciphering.

3. Subjects as Placeholders, Language as Verb

If, as I argued in the last section, for Novalis ontology mirrors semiotics and the beings of appearance are, as entities, only relative to one another or in distinction from one another, then being as a whole is only a play of appearances or a dance of illusion.

Indeed, the concept of illusion [*Schein*] is built into the concept of truth, for when things trade places – as they will in Novalis's world of change-parts and whole are reversed, or part is lifted out and presented as whole (image, signification, transposition). Skirting perilously close to nonsense, the critic affirms: »Illusion and truth together constitute only one actual reality. Illusion is the original form of truth, of original material. It is truth related to itself – reality is for reality only through relation. /The form of

being is not-being – the form of not-being [is] being./ The relation of not-being is being. Consequently truth is existence –the form of illusion, of not-being – and illusion [is] the form of existence.« (FS #232).

It is an untidy world picture, perhaps, where things turn into their opposites as the price they pay for being able to stand for each other. Indeed, Novalis's universe is one of constant change and interchange—or momentary fact—carried on the surface of the incessant moves and countermoves of action, imagination, and will that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* makes fundamental. The critic offers two formulations of this changing world, one categorical and one dynamic. In categorical terms, the underlying activity of I is change in the form of exchange – exchange between essence and property being ›sphere‹ [jointure of limited I and limited not-I, in Fichte's language], between whole and part being ›relation‹, and between cause and effect being ›change‹ (FS #451). In the underlying world of activity that is philosophy's hypothesis, »being is a rhythmic relation, the active and passive exchange between the *positing* and the *positable*.« Viewed on the surface, being is indeed, permanence – but only permanence of change, positing, and exchange (FS #456) In this context, what am I? What is I? Only the locus of change and transaction: »I am – means I find myself in a universal relation, or *I change*. – It is part of change in general, without an opposite. – an exposing to all possible uses, to original thought[.] Refrain – repetition – expression of mere activity without object and content – first *play*.« (FS #455)

In this world of shift and interchange of components, Novalis destabilizes all the components of epistemic and psychological explanation that Fichte so carefully segregated. In a world of poetic imagination, where anything can stand for anything else and form is nothing but function or power, feeling and reflection, intuition and concept merge into one another. These are all factors in the interchanging dynamic of the one self-opposed activity, after all, and it is imagination's function to mix up again what philosophic analysis has distinguished. Generally, Novalis will insist there are four features to any cognitive episode: on the objective or content side, *feeling* and that which establishes it, *intuition*, on the formal or subjective side, *reflection* and that which reflection establishes, *sensation*; these elements correspond to the four classes of categories (FS #294). These terms have the general sense they do in *Wissenschaftslehre*, they designate collisions of opposed activities that have been imaged as a ›there‹ and sub-

sequently solidified into a ›something‹ due to the reverberations of further activities. So while in terms of human faculties of cognition, there are imagination, feeling, understanding, and conception, these four are really two in terms of their product: imagination and feeling together arise as *intuition* (the real element, that which supplies the ›there‹), while understanding and conception arise as *presentation* – the cognitive counterpart of the ›there‹ or the ›aware‹ (FS #215). All of these matters are subjected to all possible permutations in the first two groups of fragments, it seems, but one can safely assume that Novalis is operating with Fichte's lexicon in hand.

The third and fourth groups of fragments introduce a new factor into Novalis's elements of knowledge, the idea of the ›stand‹ or ›trace‹ that can function in either of two positions, in the subject as *condition* or sensation or as the outwardly projected *object* or impression. The same ›thing‹ – in the sense that anything can be a thing that is but the product of imagination – or ›stand‹ can appear as *Zustand* or *Gegenstand*, as the momentary cognitive state of the subject or its momentary condition as represented.

The argument Novalis uses to introduce this distinction is novel: in general, we distinguish subject and object, but insofar as reflection seizes upon anything, whatever it targets is object, never subject. Given, therefore, that reflection can seize upon an object of cognition, e.g., a determinate sensation, it can turn round one hundred eighty degrees and investigate that which is opposed to the object – not *the subject*, but another, subject-like object (FS #288). Presentation and object, sensation and reflection are not fixed contents or fixed activities, though they do sort themselves out as ›subjective‹ and ›objective‹ in empirical consciousness (FS #'s 290, 292). Sprouting up from originary activity, each is characterized by the other. The one item that most indicates of this epistemic ambiguity is the Janus-like ›stand‹ – *Zustand* or state in context, *Gegenstand* or object in another. Only if we erroneously insist that there ›is‹ a fixed inside and a fixed outside, or that subject and object are real, and not constructed, will this duplicity of the single appearance be confusing.

Novalis provides further detail on this intriguing idea of an epistemically neutral expression that functions as subject or object, depending on the context in which it is placed. First of all, the ›stand‹ is activity or change, displacement from one position to another, so its bipolarity or double-function capacity should not be amazing (FS #306). The change of position involved is not displacement inwards, as the realist might ima-

gine, but displacement outwards. »Activity begins in the state. It always ends in the object« (FS #315, see also 310–314). Novalis ties this all together in the following passage, where he suggests that the ›stand‹, where it is and however it functions, is not so much a crystallization of being as an activity and a knowing: »On the concept of standing [*das Stehen*] Stand [*Stand*] – represents and is. It is not what it represents, and does not represent what it is. The state [*Zustand*] stands for [literally: »to«: *Zu*] and also against [*Gegen*]. Thus too the object [*Gegenstand*] stands for and against. [...] Intuiting and representing lies in the concept of standing. Stand feels insofar as it is, it senses, insofar as it represents. It feels inward, in relation to itself – it senses outward, in relation to an other – It intuites in relation to itself – it represents in relation to [an] other – this is the *Stand* in *Gegenstand* [i.e., object]. In *Zustand* [i.e., state] everything is just the opposite.« (FS #330)

With this intriguing notion of the ›stand‹ or trace-project, metamorphosed from internal activity to outward shape, Novalis has a fully articulated model of a momentary *Tatsache*, the monadic flash of activity become knowing-being. This is his own creation, not derived from Fichte, but capable of integration with the more static and abstract apparatus of the 1794/95 *Grundlage*. When Novalis, quite late in his reflections, finally turns his attention to Fichte's principles and conclusions, he is able to assimilate the position with startling simplicity, shrinking the philosopher's moral universe into his simple ›stand‹ or moment-fact: »Being, being-I, being free and oscillating are all synonyms – one expression refers to the others – it is simply the matter of a single fact.« (FS #556). Novalis goes on to note, however, that the ›simple fact‹ is not the mere glob of time, the surpassed fact, but a cosmic or eternal moment – the spiritual moment in which we live, move and have our being as »an *identically eternal acting genius* – *being-I*.« Though we want to reify this world and chop it into persistent things, or atomize its eternal ›is‹ into endless before and after, its structure comes to the fore in language and its grammar of presentation. For the world of activity become I, the sentence or unit of expression must be parsed somewhat unconventionally: »Verb – Substantive – adjective – particle.« (FS #340)

The deep connection between activity, ontology, and semiotics that mark Novalis's *Fichte Studies* signal a profound thinking-along-with that is better than any discipleship. Whether Fichte could have been nudged by further contact with Novalis and his fellow to a more satisfying and dy-

namic presentation of *Wissenschaftslehre* is an open question. A good author is lucky to get a good reader.

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**»With Respect to the Antinomies,
Fichte has a Remarkable Idea.«
Three Answers to Kant and Fichte –
Hardenberg, Hölderlin, Hegel¹**

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On January 26th, 1795, Hölderlin wrote to Hegel: »That you are approaching the concepts of religion is surely in various respects good and important. The concept of predestination you will probably treat entirely in parallel with Kant's teleology; the way in which he combines the mechanism of nature (hence also of destiny) with its purposiveness seems to me to contain indeed the entire spirit of his system; it is certainly the same purposiveness by means of which he reconciles all antinomies. With respect to the antinomies, Fichte has a remarkable idea² about which I would rather write you another time. I have been dealing for a long time with the ideal of a public education.«³ Due to the importance of this quotation, it is astonishing that it did not attract full attention in the research. In my paper I will do the following.

I will show that Hölderlin's outline in fact points out the rational nucleus of the dialectical part of Kant's theory, and that it points out Fichte's reconstruction of the structure of Kant's antinomies. Hölderlin was the first

1 This is the revised paper, that I presented on the Congress of the Northamerican Fichte Society in Philadelphia (USA), from April 1st to April 4th, 2004.

2 For specific etymological reasons I changed translator's rendering of Hölderlin's »ser merkwürdigen Gedanke« into »a remarkable idea.«

3 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe in drei Bänden*. Edited by Michael Knaupp, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1998 (hereafter Knaupp, followed by volume- and pagenumber), here, II p. 569; Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, translated and edited by Thomas Pfau, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988, p. 125/126.

to relate Fichte's concept of interdetermination [Wechselbestimmung] to Kant's antinomies. The fact that Hölderlin wrote this passage to Hegel gives insight into the intensity of their symphilosophizing during their studies in Tuebingen in 1788–1793 and their renewed dialogue in Frankfurt and Homburg in 1797–1800. It is Hölderlin who first made reference to the Kantian antinomies, whereas it is Hegel who became famous for his dialectic method based on the Kantian antinomies and who also left them behind.

Nearly at the same time as Hölderlin, another young poet and philosopher, Friedrich von Hardenberg, Novalis, was fascinated by Fichte's theory of interdetermination and the oscillation [Schweben] of the power of imagination. Whereas Hölderlin and Hegel actually had conversations on these issues, Hardenberg was not or perhaps only once involved personally in these conversations. There were unconfirmed reports that Hölderlin, Hardenberg and Fichte met in the house of Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, professor in Iena, in the summer 1795.⁴ It was said that they spoke much of religion, revelation and that, regarding philosophy, there remained many unsolved problems. The fact that in his letter to Hegel Hölderlin combined the question of Kant's teleological antinomy with Hegel's problem of the concept of religion indicates the probability that the conversation with Hardenberg in Iena touched this issue as well. We will see that the *Fichte-Studies* of Hardenberg confirm this probability.

In this paper I shall outline the methodological differences in presenting theories of antinomies between (1) Kant and (2) Fichte on the one, and (3) Hardenberg's, (4) Hölderlin's, and (5) Hegel's transformations of these theories on the other hand.

4 Johann Ludwig Döderlein said he remembered reading about the meeting in Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer's (subsequently lost) diary. Due to Döderlein's report, Niethammer wrote: »Viel über Religion gesprochen und über Offenbarung und daß für die Philosophie noch viele Fragen offen bleiben.« See the report of Johann Ludwig Döderlein on the meeting of Fichte, Hölderlin and Hardenberg (Novalis) in the house of Niethammer in Jena in his contribution, *Neue Hegeldokumente*. In: *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*. Edited by Hans-Joachim Schoeps. 1. issue, p. 2–18, Marburg 1948. See also *J. G. Fichte im Gespräch. Berichte der Zeitgenossen. Volume 1: 1761–1798*, edited by Erich Fuchs et alia, Stuttgart Bad Cannstatt 1978, p. 284, Nr. 315.

1. Kant

It must be astonishing to a modern reader that Hölderlin seeks the spirit of the Kantian system in the antinomies. Today, it is the theory of knowledge in the transcendental analysis of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the foundation of moral judgments that attract the main interest and are considered as the nucleus of the Kantian spirit, but certainly not the dialectical parts of the critical work or the antinomies. Hölderlin was not the only but probably among the first postkantian Idealists to take teleology as the keyaspect of the *Critique*.⁵ As for Kant, he himself did not know before 1787 that the purposiveness must be considered as the third, although weakest transcendental principle, besides the twelve categories and the categorical imperative.⁶ The principle of purposiveness has, according to Kant, a mere regulative validity. In the teleological part of the *Critique of Judgment* Kant aims in general at demonstrating that the teleological judgment of nature is undeniably a necessary means of cognition, in order to judge nature according to reason as a whole, whose parts are in a meaningful relation to each other. Although purposiveness is a necessary means to consider and to judge nature the only means to cognize nature is the categorically determined causal mechanism. Thus, the merely regulative valid purposiveness has to accompany and to complement the constitutive valid mechanism of causality.⁷

5 See Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Kants ‚Kritik der Urteilskraft‘ im Urteil seiner idealistischen Nachfolger*. In: Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft. Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus*. Frankfurt am Main 1991, p.191–219.

6 In his letter to Karl Leonhard Reinhold on December 28 and 31, 1787, Kant mentions the third transcendental principle he has found, the principle of purposiveness. At that time Kant acknowledges it only as a principle of the doctrine of taste. Even in his letter to Reinhold on March 17, 1788, he speaks of his forthcoming *Critique of Judgment* as a very critique of taste. That the latter provides only a part of the *Critique of Judgment* is first mentioned in a letter to Reinhold on May 12, 1789. See Immanuel Kant, *Briefwechsel*. The selection and comments by Otto Schöndörffer, an Introduction by Rudolf Malter and Joachim Kopper and a supplement, Hamburg 1972, p. 335, p. 345, and p. 385.

7 In fact, causality, as a category of relation, is partly a constitutive and partly a regulative principle of cognition. It is constitutive due to the fact that whenever we can observe a change in nature, we must necessarily conclude that it is caused by a natural cause. The problem of determining the relevant cause is, however, of regulative validity. See CpR A 179 / B 222 und A 664 / B 692. For more detail see Violetta L. Waibel, »Des principes

In so far as the question of the coexistence of the principles of the purposiveness as a means of mere judgment and of the mechanism of nature as a principle of cognition is the general subject of the teleological part of the *Critique of Judgment* we have to take Kant's teleological antinomy into closer consideration to find out what Hölderlin has in mind when he seeks the spirit of the Kantian system in Kant's treatment of the antinomies. In § 70 of the *Critique of Judgment* Kant presents the teleological antinomy as follows:

- (1) »All generation of material things and their forms must be judged as possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.«
- (2) »Some products of material nature cannot be judged as possible according to merely mechanical laws (judging them requires an entirely different law of causality, namely that of final causes).«⁸

The first proposition speaks of the mechanism of nature that belongs to the domain of efficient causality (*causa efficiens*) whereas the second proposition treats the principle of purposiveness as the cause of finality (*causa finalis*) or of practical freedom. But since these statements contain only possibilities of the judgment of nature, there can be no question here of an antinomical conflict between two laws of nature. And we have to stress that Kant admits from the beginning of this part of the critical work the compatibility of the mere judgment of the purposiveness of nature with the cognition of the mechanism of nature. But one must, however, assume that reason in fact transgresses in many cases the restrictive limits of the use of purposiveness as a mere principle of judgment and will transform these maxims into the form of laws in order then to judge the source of creation of things in accordance with them. These statements then are as follows:

- (1) »All generation of material things is possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.«

régulateurs qui sont en même temps constitutifs«. In: *Années 1796–1803. Kant. Opus postumum. Philosophie, science, éthique et théologie. Actes du 4^e Congrès international de la Société d'études kantienne de langue française. Lausanne, 21–23 octobre 1999*, edited by Ingeborg Schüssler and Christoph Erismann. Paris (Vrin) 2001, p. 147–157.

8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (CJ), translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge University Press 2000 (in the following, page references will also be given for the second original edition of the *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, 1793), here p. 258; G. p. 314.

- (2) »Some generation of such things is not possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.«⁹

From these statements the philosophically important question arises for Kant whether causal mechanism and purposiveness must of necessity be two principles as far as judgment is concerned or whether they are in their nature principles of generation, which in truth possess an as-yet-un-discovered but perhaps discoverable common root.¹⁰

Kant aims to show that the first principle is valid without any exception in each case of change in nature. But it is not true that it excludes the validity of the principle of finality as this was held by the precritical tradition. Even if an organism could be causally determined in the smallest details the organism lacked to be known *as a living organism*. Therefore, Kant maintains that the mechanical causality is insufficient for judging organisms, or men's actions.

At the end of the long and complicated argumentation, with which we cannot deal here in detail, Kant realizes that on the one hand we need both principles of judgment in order to understand organised nature, but that on the other hand we can gain no insight into the question of a possible common root of the two principles of causation, this being quite impossible on account of the impassable confines of our knowledge.¹¹

Kant's view is that the causal mechanism of nature really is valid for all objects of nature. Nevertheless, in several chains of argument he demonstrates that there exist in nature objects which cannot be adequately judged by causal mechanism. These are the living things of nature, whose inner state of organisation is to be thought of as a relation of the parts to one another, the whole to the parts and vice versa such that they are their own reciprocal cause and effect. Even if an organism could be determined according to the mechanism of nature down to the last detail, *as an organism, as a principle of life*, it would still be insufficiently determined. Fur-

9 Kant, CJ p. 259; G. p. 314/315

10 Cf. Kant, CJ p. 260; G. p. 316

11 There has been much discussion on the issue whether there is really a question of an antinomy here. On this we should perhaps comment briefly that a problem of antinomy is not, according to Kant's criteria, measured from the result, that is to say, the presence of alternatives between which no decision can be taken or the statement of the possible coexistence of two statements which turn out not to be contradictory but merely contrary. An antinomy is the problem of a transcendental illusion into which reason sees itself driven.

thermore, it is not a question only of internally organised living thing; the power of judgment sees itself justified in comprehending larger units and finally the totality of nature through the assumption of an inner purposiveness. Whereas causal mechanism makes objectively valid, constitutive knowledge possible, the purposiveness of nature leads only to an objectively undetermined knowledge, having validity only in a regulative sense. And it is only in a regulative sense valid for the reason that it can only determine the fact of relationship of the parts to the whole but is unable to determine further the condition of the possibility, the end or the idea of the whole and its parts. Provided the realms of validity and the limits of each are properly stated, the *causa efficiens* and the *causa finalis* may, according to Kant, be brought together as principles of judgment. But to see and understand a common root for the generation of causing is quite beyond our human powers of knowledge. The *causa efficiens* can claim a higher degree of binding power for its knowledge but it can only deal with individual cases, linking cause and effect step by step in successive series. The *causa finalis* can only proclaim the state of relationship based on something undetermined but is able to encompass in thought far more complex relationships, extending outwards to cover finally the totality of nature. The unification Hölderlin speaks of in his letter to Hegel consists in the determination of the characteristics that belong to each domain and the scope of their cognitive validity.

The groundbook of the Kantian antinomies is in the »Transcendental Dialectic« of the Critique of pure reason where Kant treats in detail the problem of what he calls »transcendental illusion.« To understand the full range of problems concerning the antinomies and their interpretation by Fichte as it is alluded in Hölderlin's letter to Hegel it is necessary to take also into consideration the antinomy of freedom presented in the first Critique.

In the context of Kant's enquiries on the origin, the extent and the limits of knowledge the doctrine of antinomies serves to determine the limits of knowledge. With respect to the questions concerning the limits of knowledge and the totality of the cosmos Kant assumes that reason inevitably falls victim to transcendental illusion [*transzendentelem Schein*] and, what is more, does so even when it has gained some knowledge of the nature of this appearance.

The totality of the cosmos and its limits are objects of knowledge which lie outwith the bounds of any possible perception and hence bey-

and the powers of the understanding in the narrower sense. Nevertheless reason feels the need to create order and unity in the infinite diversity of individual pieces of knowledge and certain laws of the understanding. Here we find the desire to recognize similarity as such, to group together similar things and to determine the limits. With regard to the limits of knowledge reason becomes a victim of the transcendental illusion precisely because it is at one moment driven by the understanding to adopt the perspective of one particular perceptible object and to reproduce this in thought in an interminable series to the point of infinity, at another moment, adopting the perspective of all-embracing totality, to grasp the infinite sum of the particular manifold as a totality. Hence, depending on the viewpoint, a series of similar things in infinite quantity is either finite or infinite. Two laws, *nomoi*, oppose one another and enter upon that state of conflict Kant calls antinomy.

In the first *Critique* Kant is confident that, with the help of the table of categories and its four groups – quantity, quality, relation and modality – he is able to list all possible antinomies connected with the cosmos as a totality. Each one of these four aspects makes it possible by means of a regressive analysis of conditions to determine an ultimate condition, a limit of the cosmos.

In model fashion Kant accounts at length for the plausibility of both the empiristic and the rationalistic views of all four questions of limits in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For the one side the argument is conducted using descriptive, empiristic criteria, for the other side the argument follows rationalistic criteria, the summary criteria of set theory. In order to prove a view Kant first assumes the opposing argument is correct; he demonstrates in each case that this assumption becomes so hampered by contradictions that we are finally compelled to accept the *contrary* view as true. Kant's own response to the antinomian conflict was to refrain from giving his approval either to the rationalist's position (which, surprisingly enough, lies closer to the position of common sense, the latter feeling the need to fix an ultimate limit and to suppose a circumscribed totality) or to the radical empiricist's which assumes that the limits of the cosmos will necessarily recede under enquiry into infinity. In fact Kant's solution lies in the statement that in the first two antinomies no decision can be taken in favour of the one or the other side; as for the other two, the solution must lie in the coexistence of both assumptions; this applies above all to the antinomy of freedom.

The two conflicting statements are:

»Thesis. Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them.«

»Antithesis. There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature.«¹²

Kant argues now for the plausibility of one of the statements by first supposing as true the opposing statement. He demonstrates that this opposing statement will, if carried to its extreme conclusion, finally transform itself to *its* opposite (i.e. to the original first statement). In this way the validity of the original statement is considered to have been proved. Kant's treatment of the two statements need not here concern us further. In the present context we have to deal with the phenomenon of the ineradicability of the transcendental illusion, which is every bit as present in the modern dissent between mentalists and naturalists.

What we should bear in mind is that the conflict continues to the present day, if in slightly modified form. Physicalists maintain that all mental phenomena can be reduced to nerve and brain activity and prognosticate that at some future date on the basis of certain physical data the contents of consciousness will be explainable to the last detail. Mentalists on the other hand oppose this by saying that the experience a subject has of being conscious, of feeling of thinking etc. is irreducible. The modern dissent between mentalists and physicalists, though certainly more modest in its intentions, has structural similarities with Kant's antinomy of freedom. The question, furthermore, whether freedom exists or whether it is only a deception of human subjectivity is a highly controversial question. On the Kantian premise that all existing things of the cosmos must without exception have a causal explanation (the antithesis) we have a very serious problem with the fact that there are nevertheless supposed to be some things in the world which are caused by freedom, that is to say, by the free choice of a subject and which accordingly are evidently not predictable on the basis of causal laws or necessarily determined by the chain of causes.

12 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR), translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge University Press 1998 (page references refer to the first (A) and second (B) original editions), A 444 B 472 and A 445 B 473.

Kant's well-known solution to this antinomy lies in the fact that the conflicting statements (*anti-nomoi*) are seen to be *only apparently* in contradiction with each other. If they were really contradictory, then the law of contradiction would either condemn both statements as false or proclaim one true and one false. Kant shows that the statements in fact do not mutually exclude each other (in the manner of contradiction) but are only contrary and hence can exist side by side under certain conditions to be named.

Going further Kant shows that not only the events of nature but also all actions initiated by the human will as well as their effect, even the very grounds determining the will must be able to be grasped in terms of pure mechanistic laws of cause. With this he gives his approval to radical physicalism. Accordingly that statement is correct which claims that everything which happens in the cosmos happens exclusively in accordance with the laws of nature (the statement of the antithesis).

Kant's special point, however, is that the laws of nature do not sufficiently explain the actions of reason and the human will. Thus the mentalist is proved correct when he claims that the special quality of existing in states of consciousness can never be sufficiently explained by physicalism. In Kant's view any explanation of the actions of reason and the will additionally demands, in order to be complete, the assumption of a causality of freedom which does not contradict but rather complements the thoroughgoing physicalistic type of explanation. Kant explains this in the following way. All phenomena in accordance with the dual mental capacities of intuition and concepts are situated in space and time in the causal-mechanistic and physicalistic sense. Freedom, will and normativity are on the one hand, as activities of the brain, phenomena of the sensible world; as idea of freedom, however, as idea of good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly, the »I will« and the »I will not« they most certainly are not phenomena of the sensible world and consequently cannot be placed in a space or time context. Since now the purely rational aspect of freedom and normativity must be grasped as radically non-sensible (or supersensible), causality proceeding from freedom can coexist with the causality of nature. Reason has its effects, be they no more than conceived thoughts or impulses to action which lead on to consequences in the world of phenomena and it is these effects alone which are situated in the successiveness of time and the coordinates of space. Reasonability in itself as a normative obligation – even its very opposite, unreasonability, whatever content that

particular notion may have, is always understood by Kant as being outwith time. Expressions of the will therefore must be grasped both as immanent in time, subject to the operations of the natural laws in the world of phenomena; and at the same time they must be understood as having the force of an absolute beginning in time in accordance with the law of freedom. Thus both statements in this antinomy are to the same degree valid under the very different conditions of knowledge of understanding on the one hand and knowledge of reason on the other.

Quite independently of Kant's argumentation, one can demonstrate the unremitting virulence of this question if one seeks an answer to the question whether intelligence, spontaneity, transcendence or freedom are themselves produced by causal mechanism or by final causation. Kant's answer is in the metaphor of the impenetrable barriers of first causes in the cosmos; in a similar context Johann Gottlieb Fichte speaks of a »leap« or »hiatus« which result in the emergence of freedom. The transition between freedom and appearance in space and time has never been explained by any theory – neither by Kant's nor by Fichte's – otherwise than by a qualitative leap. Now, we have to turn to Fichte's »remarkable idea« with respect to the Kantian antinomies.

2. Fichte

Fichte alludes only once to Kant's antinomies within the *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (*Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*), that is, at the end of the chapter on the »Deduction of Presentation«. This is the part of the *Foundations* (*Grundlage*), where the theoretical part of the *Science of Knowledge* (*Wissenschaftslehre*) is finished and the practical part follows. Due to the importance of this passage I will quote it in its full length:

»In self-determination, the self has been regarded just now as simultaneously determinant and determined. If, by means of the present higher determination, we reflect on the fact that what determines the absolutely determinate must itself be an absolute indeterminate; and moreover, that the self and not-self are absolutely opposed; then, given that the self is regarded as *determinate*, the indeterminate that determines it is the not-self; and given, on the contrary, that the self is regarded as *determinant*, it is itself the indeterminate, and what it determines is the not-self. And hence arises the following conflict:

If the self reflects upon itself, and thereby determines itself, the not-self is infinite and unbounded. If, on the other hand, the self reflects upon the not-self in general (upon the universe), and thereby determines it, it is itself infinite. In presentation, therefore, self and not-self are reciprocally related; if the one is finite, the other is infinite and vice versa; but one of the two is always infinite. – (Here lies the ground of the antinomies expounded by Kant.)¹³

When Hölderlin made his significant allusion to Fichte's reading of Kant's antinomies within the *Foundations* (*Grundlage*) of 1794/95, he promised Hegel to write on this topic in more detail in another letter. Such a letter is neither handed down to our days nor might it yet been written.

So we have to take into closer consideration the context in which Fichte mentions the Kantian antinomies that is the »Deduction of Presentation«. Fichte mentions Kants antinomies in general without specifying or pointing out that he must have in mind an antinomy between the I and the Not-I as a sort of antinomy of freedom. The very complex relation between determination and indetermination he has dealt with is sufficient to Fichte to mark the problem of antinomies. It is indeed not self-evident, how this complex question should be seen as an antinomical conflict comparable to Kant's antinomies. Therefore, our task consists in making this issue explicit.

We have to remember that Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* (*Wissenschaftslehre*) pointed out the relevance of Kant's subjective turn and focused on freedom and spontaneity of the I.¹⁴ As it is well known, this I is thought to be the first principle of knowledge as such, whereas the Not-I is the second

13 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, in: *The Science of Knowledge*, edited and translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 217. See also Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, in: *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Stuttgart / Bad Cannstatt 1964 ff. (abbreviated as »GA« with the number of the volume and the page; references to the edition of Fichte's works by his son Immanuel Hermann Fichte (Sämtliche Werke = SW) are added), here GA I 2, p. 383/384 and SW I, p. 245/246.

14 For further specification on this issue see Violetta L. Waibel, *Das »System der Freiheit« und die »Fesseln der Dinge«. Fichtes Begründung der Gegenstandskonstitution (1794/95)*. In: *System der Vernunft – Kant und der Deutsche Idealismus: II. Kant und der Frühidealismus*, edited by Jürgen Stolzenberg, Hamburg (Meiner), 2007, p. 103–128.

principle. The determination of the first and the second principle implicitly introduces valuation in a strictly normative sense. At first glance this valuation and its order seem to be well founded. Nevertheless, in the long run, these two principles and their valuation entail exactly those problems that are connected with the antinomy of freedom and necessity. Although Fichte mentions Kant's antinomies only in the end of the theoretical part of the *Science of Knowledge* (*Wissenschaftslehre*), the content of the conflict of freedom and necessity is already present in the deduction of the category of interaction [Wechselbestimmung] of the I and the Not-I without being explicitly named as an antinomy.

But whereas Kant judges the antinomy between causal necessity and theoretical and practical freedom in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a mere illusion that arises because of the disregard for the scope and the boundaries of the theoretical domain of the merely descriptive kind of the understanding and the practical domain of the norm-positing, prescriptive spontaneity and reason, we can maintain that Fichte's dialectical methodology is operating with a logical structure that is comparable to Kant's antinomies. In both theories we find an analysis of conflicting propositions, each of which can be shown as being a valid proposition. They also resemble each other in presenting a solution that changes the conflict into a mere illusion in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant knows two typological different reasons that such an illusion can be effective. The first consists in the fact that a certain question can neither be solved by means of the understanding, nor by means of reason. The second consists in the fact that the conflicting elements can coexist because they arise out of totally independent sources and, therefore, do not and cannot exclude each other. Fichte is far from operating with this sort of argument. In his view, there are conflicts between certain propositions that result from the level of reflections and notions that are already yielded in the deduction. Having analyzed such a conflict the next step is to search for and bring out those notions that are apt to solve the conflict in question. Fichte's dialectical method can be called a successive amplification of the number of philosophical notions that are brought into play that, at the same time, entail a successive limitation of the domains of each of these notions through the increasing number of new notions. But these notions do not only represent a mereological sum. Fichte's aim is to point out the intrinsic interactions and relations of these notions. There is finally one boundary that cannot be transgressed and where this methodological development of

notions and reflections comes to an end. This is the final hiatus between the real and the ideal world or the being and the consciousness that, according to Fichte, is bridged by the oscillation of the power of imagination. At the same time this hiatus between the subjective world of the consciousness and the objective world of the being touches the antinomy between freedom (spontaneity) and necessity (mechanism).

It is only the construction of the power of imagination with its oscillation between the I and the Not-I that follows this kind of antinomical methodology that analyzes a conflict and offers a solution by introducing and placing new elements of reflected notions. The »Deduction of Presentation« and the practical part of the *Science of Knowledge* operates with a slightly different methodology. But in fact the basic conflict of mechanism and purposiveness, of necessity and freedom dominates the entire early *Science of Knowledge*.

Thus, I will reconstruct in broad strokes the paradigmatic structure of the antinomy of freedom in Fichte's early *Science of Knowledge*.

§ 3 of the *Science of Knowledge* shows that, on the basis of the categories of reality and negation, there is a relation between the I and the Not-I. This relation leads, as is well known, to a theoretical and a practical proposition, only the first one being of interest for my question. The theoretical proposition »the self posits itself as limited by the not-self«¹⁵ is analysed in terms of the categories of relation. The I, in so far it posits itself, is interpreted as a relation of substantiality, the I determined by the Not-I, however, as a relation of causality. By comparing these two relations, Fichte develops in arguments, which I will not summarize here, the notions of independent activities of the I and the Not-I, i.e., the spontaneity of the faculty of imagination as a sort of instantiation of freedom and the famous check as a mechanical effect on the I. Having reached this point, a series of contradictions and syntheses are meant to give the final synthesis of the imagination.

In Fichte's construction we meet the division of form and material, which concerns the relation of substantiality and causality in a more abstract way than the Kantian division of form and material. Just to remind, Kant's fundamental claim in the transcendental aesthetic is that the only thing which could be given to mind is the sensible *material*, the given manifold, whereas

15 See Fichte, *The Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, Heath/Lachs, p. 122; GA I 2, p. 285; SW I, p.126.

the sensible *form* is the pure intuition of time and space and in concreto the inner and outer sense of the intellect, in which the given manifold is thought to stand together. The division of form and material is repeated on the level of notions. The pure notions of reason (the categories) are mere functions or forms of the intellect, whereas the empirical notions, on which these forms are applied, give the content, or let's say, material of the thinking.

With respect to the relation of causality of Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* the division of form and material allows the difference of ideal and real to be inserted, or in other terms, of quantitative and qualitative elements within the relation of causality.¹⁶ The check of the Not-I on the one hand is the material-giving realistic element that serves to constitute the imagination, and, on the other, a form-giving element which constitutes the idealistic aspects of the imagination.

The form-material division of the relation of substantiality refers to the form-giving and content-positing activities of mind. Thus the spontaneity of intellect opens the possibility of producing any kind of representational content, according to the subjective forms of mind. For my purposes at the moment it is only necessary to mention the different elements of form and material, of quality and quantity. I will forgo several steps of Fichte's account here.¹⁷

If we, for an instant, accept that Fichte's construction is absolutely controlled and anything but dark or impenetrable, we can identify its aim in putting together the extremes of empiricist mechanical and idealist purpose-based models of explaining the fact of imagination, connecting being and consciousness, on the basis of the form-material division which Kant suggested earlier in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Assuming that this interpretation is correct, we would have become acquainted with a theory of presentation whose main intention is to show that the connection between the I and the Not-I is thought to be continuous by a successive application of forms and functions (categories) of the intellect. As we have seen, this construction is

16 See Fichte, *The Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, Heath/Lachs, p. 145; GA I 2, p. 308/309; SW I, p. 153.

17 For a more detailed reconstruction of the faculty of imagination in the *Grundlage* see Violetta L. Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte. 1794–1800*, Paderborn, München, Wien Zürich 200, p. 301–317; furthermore Wilhelm Metz, *Kategorienduktion und produktive Einbildungskraft in der theoretischen Philosophie Kants und Fichtes*, Stuttgart, Bad Cannstatt 1991.

guided by the relational categories and by the opposition of empiricism and idealism, both of which give in some way plausible explanations, but each of which alone is unilateral as well. The result that Fichte offers is as follows.

The objective and the subjective are normally of absolute opposite nature, whatever their nature as such may be. For this reason, each of them has dominion over its own world. But there is also a frontier which not only divides these worlds but makes them touch. The frontier is the only thing they have in common, or let's say, the check is possible. It is the faculty of imagination that responds to this circumstance to pick up the different, completely opposite and mutually exclusive elements but nevertheless to grasp them together [Zusammentreffen und Zusammenfassen].¹⁸ This is possible because of the nature of the I, which is undetermined activity as well as mental substance, and as such is open to be determined by a check. Being hit by a check, the I gets to know its unlimited nature and thereby limits itself.

The result is the faculty of imagination oscillating between the unlimited and the self-limiting activity. The Fichtean construction of a conceptual continuity can be interpreted as an answer to the Kantian question of how it could be possible that mere forms of the intellect such as categories can be said to determine factual matters of the world. If it is to be accepted that there are two worlds, foreign to each other but with a common frontier, then Fichte has intended to show that there is the hiatus between freedom and necessity. Freedom as spontaneity is at one time [*in eins*] this power to recognize the qualitatively intransgressible hiatus and to grasp these two foreign worlds quantitatively together on the level of consciousness.

The oscillation between finite and infinite instances can finally be brought forward on every possible level of abstraction as is shown in the »Deduction of Presentation«. According to the »Deduction of Presentation« the faculty of imagination is the faculty that suspends itself as power of producing imaginations in order to give way to a mere abstract kind of thinkability. In this case the power of imagination produces an oscillation between object and not-object. The action of spontaneity is determined and fixed to have no object that is no imaginable object, but to produce only abstract thoughts. The faculty of imagination suspends itself because it is normally the power of producing imaginations and now decides to suspend this pro-

18 See Fichte, *The Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, Heath/Lachs, pp. 190–91; GA I 2, p. 356/357; SW I, p. 212.

duction. This is what Fichte expresses in the passage quoted above where he alludes to the Kantian antinomies. We have to keep in mind that the context of the oscillation between positing an instance in one moment and its self-suspension in the next moment is as much important to Hardenberg as to Hegel.

In so far as Fichte explains the imagination as an action of the subject in which the causal mechanism of the Not-I affecting the I is tightly connected with human reason directed towards ends (purposes) he grounds the consciousness as such as a nexus of the *causa finalis* as a first principle and the *causa efficiens* as a second principle. Whereas Kant's answer of the necessary coexistence of both principles is the answer to the pre-critical conflicting discussions, Fichte ignores this traditional conflict. Instead, he works out a phenomenological consideration profoundly based on Kant's result. As the explanation of the imagination needs the bridging of the two worlds of the being and the consciousness, or the real and the ideal by the oscillating power of imagination, Fichte allows to hold laconically that the antinomies are a mere question of directing the reflection on the one or on the other side of what is tied together by the power of imagination. This is even valid for the higher levels of reflection.

3. Hardenberg

As to Hardenberg, he obviously followed Fichte in treating the problem of the antinomies in the *Fichte-Studies* of 1795/96. But whereas Fichte yet one time mentions the notion of the antinomy Hardenberg does not explicitly use this notion. However, there are passages suggesting that he dealt with this issue. In the *Fichte-Study* number 555 he writes in an astonishing parallel to Fichte:

»555. [The] Law of the concept and [the] law of the object must be identical – only separable in reflection – /Concept and intuition are identical when referred to the I, separate when one reflects upon both without referring them to the I./ If I reflect specifically upon the I, then there is no Not-I – if I reflect without reflecting specifically upon the I, then there is a Not-I. *Free reflection* is about the Not-I – *determinate reflection* is about the I. In both cases the I is free and unfree, only in different ways. It is free in that it reflects upon itself as unfree, as a Not-I. It is free in that it reflects upon itself as free, as an I. In the former it is free as

intelligence, in the latter as pure I. In the former it separates its reflecting activity from its being – it goes outside itself – in the latter it unites both [reflecting activity and its being] – it goes into itself. It must do the first in order to be able to do the other. The last is the end, the first is the means – the end occasions the means. The means effects the end. /All knowledge should produce morality – the moral drive, the drive towards freedom occasion knowledge./ To be free is the tendency of the I – the capacity to be free is the productive imagination. – *Harmony* is the condition of its activity – of [its] *oscillating*, between opposites. Being one with yourself is thus the fundamental condition of the highest end – to Be, or to be free. All being, being in general, is nothing but being free – *oscillating* between extremes that necessarily are to be united and necessarily are to be separated. All reality radiates from this light-point of oscillation – everything is contained in it – object and subject have their being through it, not it through them. I-ness or productive power of imagination, the *oscillating* – determine, produce the extremes between which oscillation occurs – This is a deception, but only in the realm of ordinary understanding. Otherwise it is something thoroughly real, because the oscillating, its cause, is the source, the mother of all reality, [is] reality itself.

On the nature of this oscillation.«¹⁹

Hardenberg's reflections on this issue must be judged as a congenial interpretation of Kant as well as of Fichte, reading the one philosophy with the elements of the other and vice versa. Hardenberg's first sentence, »[The] Law of the concept and [the] law of the object must be identical«, reminds us of Kant's following thesis in the Critique of Pure Reason: «The conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience».²⁰ Hardenberg does not continue his reflections along the lines of the context to which

19 Friedrich von Hardenberg, *Fichte-Studien* (1795/96), in: *Novalis. Fichte Studies*, edited and translated by Jane Kneller. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Cambridge University Press 2003. See also in: *Novalis Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, edited by Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, et alia, 2nd, according to the manuscript, completed, enlarged, and improved edition, 6 in 7 volumes, Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln 1960–1999, NS II, p. 104–296 (hereafter FS followed with the number of the reflection and the pagereference to the English edition), here FS 555, p. 164/165.

20 Kant, CPR A 111 and A 158 B 197.

the above passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* belongs, that is, the system of principles of the pure understanding. Whereas Kant's aim is to justify the possibility of objectively valid judgments although they are founded in merely subjective faculties of the mind, Hardenberg considers phenomenological questions of the consciousness as he knows it from Fichte. We may assume that Hardenberg understood well that Fichte's construction of the power of imagination in the synthesis of the *Foundations* (*Grundlage*) is Fichte's phenomenological solution of Kant's task to show the identity of both conditions.

Having recognized this systematic coherence between Kant and Fichte, which I cannot present in more detail now, Hardenberg consequently continues with his thoughts about what happens when the reflection is directed towards this or that content. Hardenberg's problem clearly refers to Fichte's »Deduction of Presentation«. In the »Deduction of Presentation« Fichte holds that the power of imagination not only constitutes the imagination of objects of the real world or imagined objects of the inner world, but every kind of presentation – even the self-representational thought of the I. It is the I that can choose whether it reflects on the I or on the Not-I. It is the I's activity that determines the I itself or a Not-I and that therefore determines spontaneously and according to its free will to be unfree by itself, or by a Not-I. It is remarkable that it is Hardenberg and not Fichte, who speaks in this context of the free will, of ends and means, and that the free will posits intentions and purposes whereas the unfree state is the state of necessity or of a means. »The means effects the end.« Fichte works out and makes explicit the theoretical importance of the will and the ends in the first sections of his *of the Natural Right* in 1796. Re-reading the *of Doctrine of the Entire Science* Hardenberg may have completed Fichte's earlier work by the elements of his later work, *Foundations of the Natural Right*. It is evident that Hardenberg saw that the theoretical dualism of laws of concepts and laws of objects (Hardenberg's formula), and also the question of the conditions of the possibility of experience and the conditions of the possibility of objects of experience (Kant's formula) are mirrored in Fichte's dualism of subjective ends and objective means, or of spontaneous substantiality and mechanical causality. The result of Fichte's construction of the oscillation of the power of imagination is explicitly mentioned. The subject, by means of imagination that elevates itself to the level of pure thought by self-suspension, is reflected as free and

spontaneous on the one side of this oscillation and as unfree and determined on the other side of the oscillation.

It seems as if Hardenberg understood well Fichte's allusion to Kant's antinomies at the end of his »Deduction of Presentation«. A comparison of what Hardenberg wrote in FS 555 and what Fichte wrote makes this evident. Hardenberg's words are the following: »It [the I] is free in that it reflects upon itself as unfree, as a Not-I. It is free in that it reflects upon itself as free, as an I. In the former it is free as intelligence, in the latter as pure I. In the former it separates its reflecting activity from its being – it goes outside itself – in the latter it unites both [reflecting activity and its being] – it goes into itself. It must do the first in order to be able to do the other. The last is the end, the first is the means – the end occasions the means. The means effects the end.«

Fichte writes as follows: »If the self reflects upon itself, and thereby determines itself, the not-self is infinite and unbounded. If, on the other hand, the self reflects upon the not-self in general (upon the universe), and thereby determines it, it is itself infinite. In presentation, therefore, self and not-self are reciprocally related; if the one is finite, the other is infinite, and vice versa; but one of the two is always infinite. – (Here lies the ground of the antinomies expounded by Kant.)«²¹

Hardenberg fully agrees with Fichte's idea now to reflect on the one and now on the other instance. Each act of reflection determines what before was undetermined and vice versa. The knowledge of the succession of these acts produces not only the oscillation but at the same time the knowledge of the difference and the special kind of connection of the instances.

In one of the first Fichte-Studies, the number 12, Hardenberg notices: »The highest *presentation* of the incomprehensible is synthesis – unity of the un-unifiable. Positing of contradiction as not-contradiction.«²² This proposition gives an example of how Hardenberg brings forward the antinomies. He did not only reconstruct Fichte's transformation of Kant's third antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason* but showed also interest in making thought-experiments with paradoxical possibilities. These paradoxical plays on words make use of the self-positing and self-suspension of in-

21 Fichte, *The Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, Heath/Lachs, p. 217 and GA I 2, p. 384; SW I p. 246/247.

22 Hardenberg, FS 12, p. 11.

stances as it is common to interaction as such. A detailed investigation of Hardenberg's thought-experiments and of his dialectic of negation deserves to be worked out in length. Here, however, I will continue with Hölderlin and then conclude with Hegel.

4. Hölderlin

Hölderlin does not only suppose that Hegel treats the notions of religion as Kant does with the teleological antinomy but he also insinuates to have an ideal of educating a people [Ideal der Volkserziehung] in his mind that includes Kant's logic of the antinomies of freedom. A general view on Hölderlin's idea on the development of men shows that he thinks that elements of nature are always tightly combined with the elements of human reason. Nature is present as a mere need that operates like a mechanical machine and it is present as a divine appearance of the unreflected reason in the shape of nature. Reason, too, is present in two manners. First it figures human freedom in an emphatic meaning and second it figures freedom that falls down to human presumption. According to Hölderlin, at this point freedom is neglected by freedom and the pure fate gains the domination.

To be sure, Hölderlin does not actually write a philosophical treatise in the strong sense on the intricate relation of necessity and freedom, or of mechanism and purposiveness. However, his poetic works are deeply dependant on Kant's theory of these coexisting principles. Hölderlin has written a few short papers that deal with these problems. One of them is known as the fragment *On the Law of Freedom* (*There is a State of Nature ...*), while the other is called *On the Concept of Punishment*. Both were written in 1794/95 (*Über das Gesetz der Freiheit; Über den Begriff der Straffe*).

In the fragment *On the Law of Freedom*, Hölderlin claims that there is a natural state of man, which contingently can be a moral state that he calls the morality of divine instinct. The fate of man consists in the necessity to transform the natural and only contingently divine state of man into a well founded state of freedom and spontaneity that knows to protect itself against diverse contestations. In the fragment *On the Concept of Punishment*, Hölderlin systematically continues his thoughts of the earlier fragment asking how man can know what the law of freedom obliges him to do. He argues as follows. As long as someone acts due to the natural divine

state, he does not know that there is the law of freedom. If this person acts in conflict with the duties of the law of freedom, he experiences punishment. Now and only now, he learns of the existence of the law of freedom. In the fragment *On the Law of Freedom* Hölderlin holds: »The first time that the law of freedom discloses itself to us, it appears as punishing. The origin of all our virtue occurs in evil.«²³ Due to this argument there is no possibility to have an idea of the law of freedom without the experience of its resistance or its punishment against us. If we do not wish to accuse Hölderlin of simple empiricism, we must see what the reasons for his arguments are. Hölderlin clearly has in mind Kant's structure of arguments in favour of the category of causality. In the chapter on the »System of all principles of pure understanding« of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant shows that the analysis of causality must begin with the factual statement of change in the world, in Hölderlin's case the feeling of being punished. If we are able to confirm constitutively that there is change in the world, we are always in the position to assume a cause of the change in question. It is only the next step that allows to search, or to determine the causal laws of the event in question. This is exactly the structure of Hölderlin's argument. In analogy to Kant's thesis according to which the determination of a possible cause of a certain change in the world is not a mere empirical combination of an effect with its cause but a synthetic step of thought,²⁴ Hölderlin maintains the same position with respect to his question. In order to state that something is a punishment in reaction to an immoral act is the first step of a judgement of reason. The conclusion that there exists a moral law that is the law of freedom that caused the punishment can never be a mere empirical determination of a certain fact but is the result of a causal synthesis of reason. The problem Hölderlin is confronted with and that he left unresolved is whether the concluded cause [die erschlossene Ursache] is itself an empirical instance or a product of reason. Hölderlin deals with the difference between a real ground and a ground of cognition [Realgrund oder Erkenntnisgrund]. The first one demands to recognize the law (that is the moral law) through its resistance [am Widerstand

23 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. Pfau, Thomas, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988, p. 34; *Es giebt einen Naturzustand...*, in: Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* in 3 volumes edited by Michael Knaupp, Darmstadt 1998, II p. 46–47, p. 47.

24 See Kant on the second »analogy of experience«, CRP A 198 B 232 – A 211 B 256.

erkennen], the second one demands to recognize the law in behalf of the resistance [um des Widerstands willen anerkennen]. In the first case the causal relation is a mechanical one, whereas the second case is the conclusion on a cause that is at the same time a purpose.

It is obvious that Hölderlin studied very carefully Kant's account of the causal mechanism and then applied it to his account of morality and purposiveness even when it is clear that Hölderlin finally failed to find the correct solution to the dense sketch of the intricate problem presented in his fragment *On the Concept of Punishment*.

Furthermore, we may assume that Hölderlin's theoretical questions on the law of freedom and the notion of punishment arose out of his deep interest in the Greek classical tragedy. In his philosophy the theory of tragedy is of high importance. The tragedy reflects the mutual dependency as much as conflict between fate and spontaneity, or between necessity and freedom. Hölderlin is interested in showing how this relation determines human life, where now dominates the one and now the other principle.

It can only be mentioned here that the protagonist of Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion* who runs through a cultural education with its progresses and setbacks is the way of finding one's free access to freedom and spontaneity. Hyperion must learn to distinguish what inevitably belongs to the domain of men's nature of necessity and fate and what is accessible to the possible space of freedom. This is the key aspect of what Hölderlin calls his ideal of educating people. Hyperion is not only a protagonist who has to run through and experience on his own the ups and downs of life but who thus becomes the ideal teacher of mankind according to the project mentioned in his letter to Hegel cited above.

5. Hegel

Young Hegel analyzed social, institutional, moral problems of the modern life as problems of disunion, or dichotomy [Entzweiung]. Disunion, »Entzweiung,« was one of the keywords of his early philosophical questions. In his first publication of a systematic philosophical work, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* of 1801, Hegel outlines his idea of how to solve the question of Disunion in general. In this work, the outline of his own thoughts on a true system of philosophy is based on

Kant's doctrine of antinomies, although Hegel modified this doctrine contrary to Kant's intentions. Hegel's critical review of Fichte's system in this work may have concealed the systematic connection to the content that I have already presented in this paper. If we take into consideration the possible philosophical discussions between Hölderlin and Hegel, which Hölderlin mentioned in his letter quoted above, and which they resumed in Frankfurt on Main between 1797 and 1800, then we should interpret Hegel's work on *The Difference* in close relation to these discussions. Hölderlin's letter could have given an important stimulus to the sequence of discussions on this topic.

To sum up, we must keep in mind: Fichte discovered Kant's antinomical relation of mechanism and purposiveness for his construction of imagination as such and he then transferred this relation to the »Deduction of Presentation«. Fichte, contrary to Kant, considers purposiveness of the subjective spontaneity to be higher than the mechanism that presents the objective world. Kant, namely, claims that the mechanism of nature yields a higher degree of cognition than the mere regulative judgements of purposiveness. Fichte implicitly gives preference to reason rather than to understanding.

However, it was Hegel who discovered a further philosophical problem in Fichte's account of imagination. Whereas Fichte postulated the theorem of the self-suspension of the power of imagination [Selbstvernichtung der Einbildungskraft durch Einbildungskraft] that gives way to the pure thought, Hegel demanded to repeat this self-suspension of imagination on a higher level. According to Hegel, the highest law of the reflection of the understanding is to suspend itself in order to give way to reason: »So far as reflection makes itself its own object, its supreme law, given to it by Reason and moving it to become Reason, is to nullify itself«. ²⁵ Hegel's important interest in the relation of reason and understanding arose from Kant's discussion of the rational and empirical solution of the antinomical conflicts and from Fichte's transformation of the third antinomy into the op-

25 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, edited and translated by Henry Siltan Harris, and Walter Cerf, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1977, p. 96 and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie* (1801), in: G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke* in 20 volumes [hereafter WW], volume II, (*Jenaer Schriften 1801–1807*), Frankfurt on Main 1986, p. 28.

position of idealism and realism that he unified in the transcendental idealism.

Hegel summarizes the disputes with Fichte and all the others, of whom he knew in his Frankfort period and whose theories he studied very attentively, as having appropriated Kant's doctrine of antinomies. He accuses them as follows: »If one reflects only on the formal aspects of speculation and holds fast to the synthesis of knowledge [only] in analytic form, then antinomy, that is, the contradiction that cancels itself, is the highest formal expression of knowledge and truth«.²⁶

In order to transgress the mere formal state of philosophy Hegel postulates transcendental imagination. It is obvious that Hegel directs this systematic claim first against Kant who postulated the coexistence of the two principles of the antinomies of freedom without any further synthesis of them. We may assume that Hegel well understood the Fichtean project to offer a better answer on this uncombined coexistence of principles with his concept of oscillation of the power of imagination and the idea of pure knowledge that arises of the self-suspension of the power of imagination. With regard to the latter theorem Hegel emphasizes in a critical manner: »Pure knowing, which would be knowing without intuition, is the nullification of the opposites in contradiction«.²⁷ According to Hegel, the transcendental imagination must not be confused with the empirical imagination. Hegel gives the following explanation of the transcendental imagination: »In philosophical knowledge, what is intuited is an activity of both intelligence and nature, of consciousness and the unconscious together. It belongs to both worlds at once, the ideal and the real. It belongs to the ideal world because it is posited in the intelligence and, hence, in freedom. It belongs to the real world because it gets its place in the objective totality, it is deduced as a link in the chain of necessity«.²⁸ By reading this passage only superficially one could think that it expresses exactly what Fichte claims with the oscillation of the power of imagination. But, Hegel understood well that the oscillation must not only be taken seriously but surpassed by a better and stronger power of connection. This means that there is an endless series of states of determination and indetermination and so on in the oscillation. It is true that Fichte did not request a strong

26 Hegel, *Difference*, Harris/Cerf, p. 107, 108; WW II, 39.

27 Hegel, *Difference*, Harris/Cerf, p. 109; WW II, 42.

28 Hegel, *Difference*, Harris/Cerf, p. 110; WW II, 42.

identity of both principles, but only a sort of a stronger coexistence than we know it from Kant. However, with regard to Kant's own analysis of the coexistence of purposiveness and mechanism it is absolutely consequent that there must actually be postulated a sort of identity of them. According to Kant, the one and the same event can be judged with regard to the one or the other principle. Hegel points to the insight that the factual identity of the one event that is judged through two different principles and aspects must be taken into consideration by philosophical knowledge. Hegel claims that philosophical knowledge should not only take care of the given coexisting differences and their state of being separated in the analysis, but, moreover, must make explicit the factual identity even at the level of philosophical knowledge. This is the reason why he postulates the transcendental imagination. According to Kant's third antinomy of freedom and necessity and his teleological antinomy, Hegel's claim can be made comprehensible. The question of whether we can accord with this postulate regarding the so-called mathematical antinomies, the first and the second one of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, requires a further investigation that I cannot do here.

6. Conclusion

The doctrine of the antinomies in the dialectical parts of Kant's critical works serve to signify the bounds of possible cognition. With regard to the antinomies of freedom Kant's main result is the postulated necessary coexistence of the conflicting principles. Fichte discovers the third antinomy in order to apply the methodological structure of them to the construction of imagination as such. Furthermore, he claims not only the coexistence of the two principles, as Kant does, but shows their close inner connection in his construction of the imagination and on further higher levels of reflection. Hardenberg clearly understood the systematical coherence of Kant and Fichte with regard to this question and reconstructed this context on his own. He searched the paradoxical moments of the antinomies and brought forward his reflections on what is the bound of positing and suspending something. Hölderlin was not only the first to discover the Kantian critical spirit within his discussions of the antinomies but recognized the remarkable ideas of Fichte with respect to Kant's antinomies. Following Fichte, he searched to understand the intrinsic connection of the two principles, the purposiveness

and the mechanism, and later developed his philosophy of tragedy based on these studies. Finally, Hegel's fundamental philosophical problem – the question of the domination of reason over the understanding and his systematical methodology – arose from the critical review of the discussions on the antinomical conflicts. He claimed that philosophical knowledge of reason must not only consider the coexisting difference of both principles, the purposiveness and the mechanism, but must also make explicit their intrinsic identity in the transcendental imagination.²⁹

29 I owe my appreciation for the revision of my paper to Lara Ostaric and to Kenneth Caskie.

Forgetfulness and Foundationalism: Schlegel's Critique of Fichte's Idealism

Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert

Traditional English language collections on Fichte typically lament the indifference with which he is treated in the Anglophone philosophical community. This indifference is contrasted to the ample attention this community gives to other figures of the same period of German philosophy, such as Kant, Hegel, and Schelling. Typically we are reminded of Fichte's importance via references to the philosophers who were influenced by his thought, including not only the very thinkers who often overshadow him, namely, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling, but also thinkers of later periods such as Marx, Husserl, Heidegger, and other heirs to the tradition of German Idealism.

Fichte is thus an underdog – deserving far more recognition than he has hitherto received (though we must note the excellent work done on him in the last decades, signaling a turn in the tide).¹ Yet, Fichte comes across as a star when compared to another German philosopher from roughly the same period. This dramatically neglected figure was, until quite recently, not even considered to be a philosopher at all, either in English or German speaking lands; largely because the movement to which this figure belonged was dismissed as a literary movement.² The figure is Friedrich Schlegel and the movement is early German Romanticism,

1 See for example: Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore, eds, *New Perspectives on Fichte* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996); Wayne Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte's Jena Project* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

of which he was the most prominent philosophical representative – indeed, Schlegel arguably gave us the very first definition of the term ›romanticism‹.³

Early in his philosophical development Schlegel fell under the spell of Fichte. When Schlegel and his good friend, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) corresponded, they referred to their ›fichtesizing‹ [*fichtisieren*] sessions, because Fichte's philosophy was a favorite topic of discussion. Yet, as will often happen when philosophers get together to discuss the views of another philosopher, the results of these conversations were far from songs of praise: what emerged from Novalis and Schlegel's conversations were strong critiques of certain aspects of Fichte's thought, and so the initial spell Fichte had cast upon the young Romantics was broken.⁴ An investigation of the details of what broke the spell that Fichte had exerted upon Schlegel brings a central debate of the post-Kantian period into sharp relief: the debate concerning the grounds of knowledge.

As we shall see, Schlegel displayed a high degree of characteristic *Frechheit* in his claims regarding the limitations of Fichte's philosophy, but this should not overshadow the great respect he had for both the work and the person (so there is a sense in which Fichte continued to charm Schlegel). *Athenäum Fragment 216* nicely captures Schlegel's admiration for Fichte: ›The French Revolution, Fichte's philosophy, and Goethe's *Meister* are the greatest tendencies of the age,‹ he announces.⁵ Given that Schlegel

2 There has been a recent surge of interest in the philosophical dimensions of early German Romanticism. For a discussion of the recent literature see Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, ›The Revival of *Frühromantik* in the Anglophone World,‹ *Philosophy Today* (Spring 2005): 96–117.

3 In his recent review of a new book on Felix Mendelssohn, Charles Rosen refers to Schlegel as he ›who gave us our first definition of Romanticism‹ (*Times Literary Supplement*, No. 5268 (March 19, 2004): 3). This claim echoes similar claims made by thinkers such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Walter Benjamin, and Ernst Behler.

4 For more on the relation between the early German Romantics and Fichte, see Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung. Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1997) – in English as, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans./ed., Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), esp. Lectures 2, 9, and 10.

5 The *Athenäum Fragments*, as well as the *Critical Fragments*, and *Ideas* have been translated by Peter Firchow in *Friedrich Schlegel. Philosophical Fragments* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), and I have used, with minor modifications, his translations of the fragments. Unless otherwise indicated, all oth-

considered the French Revolution and Goethe's novel to be paramount historical events, to include Fichte's philosophy in this trinity is a noteworthy tribute. Indeed, Schlegel believed that Fichte's work had done for philosophy what the French Revolution had done for political structures and Goethe's *Meister* had done for literary form: Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* had revolutionized the field of philosophy, setting it on a path that celebrated human freedom, one which every subsequent philosopher would have to traverse.

Nevertheless, Schlegel had far from unconditional approbation for Fichte: already a cursory look at the key term ›tendency‹ in *Fragment 216* cited above leads us to the root of a tension that would inevitably arise between the philosophical approaches of these two thinkers. ›Tendencies‹, would be far too provisional for Fichte's taste, a tendency could never support his *Wissenschaftslehre*. Yet, it was precisely tendencies, with their share of uncertainty, which were the very fabric of Schlegel's critical philosophy. This is, I believe, a fruitful point of comparison between Fichte and Schlegel's critical philosophy: Fichte's critical philosophy was a kind of pure foundationalist idealism (Fichte, after all, stressed that any attempt to fuse idealism with realism was doomed to be an »inconsistent enterprise«⁶), whereas Schlegel's critical philosophy was not a pure form of idealism at all; it was, as shall become clear in due course, a unique anti-foundationalist hybrid of idealism (à la Fichte) with realism (à la Spinoza) that was coherentist (and coherent) through and through.

Schlegel's critique of Fichte was not carried out as an attempt to finish something Fichte did not himself finish (as Fichte was allegedly carrying out the revolution Kant had not finished). Schlegel was interested in something more far-reaching than Fichte (or indeed Kant), a reform of the very conception of philosophy that was shaping the post-Kantian period – he sought to move philosophy away from its moorings in science and to

er translations of Schlegel's work are my own. References to Schlegel's original work are to *Friedrich Schlegel Kritische Ausgabe* (KA), in 35 volumes, edited by Ernst Behler et al. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1958 ff.)

- 6 *First Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre* in J.G. Fichte: *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings* (IWL), trans./ed., Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994) (hereafter IWL), p. 12. J.G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds., R. Lauth, Hans Gliwitzky, Erich Fuchs, and H. Jakob (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1964 ff.) (hereafter GA), p. 426.

bring it into the company of art and history. Schlegel thus endorsed a progressive and never-ending method for philosophy, based on the view that our knowledge claims would never be endowed with the certainty granted by absolute foundations, but rather would only ever have increasing degrees of probability, they would, as it were, tend towards truth. An infinite search or longing for the infinite (the totality of all truths) replaces any model (not just Fichte's) that departs from an absolute first principle.

Though this never-ending story of our longing for the infinite might superficially appear as fairy-tale-like approach to philosophical problems, it was, in fact, a much more sober alternative than the one Fichte offered. ›Sober‹ is intended here in more than one of its connotations; for Schlegel likened Fichte's attempts to explain the foundations of our knowledge to those of a drunk who never tires of the futile activity of mounting and then promptly falling from the horse that is supposed to take him to his destination, and so is always left just where he began without having moved any closer to where he wants to go.⁷ Before embarking upon our investigation of Schlegel's departure from Fichte's philosophy, let us examine, in an admittedly brief and rather selective way, Fichte's early views of philosophy, with an eye on those elements that Schlegel addresses in his critique.⁸

1. Fichte on Critical Philosophy and Dogmatism

In his *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797–98), Fichte develops his claim that the identity of the I as subject and as object is the fundamental foundation of all knowledge.⁹ He even claims that »a systematic derivation of consciousness as a whole (or, what amounts to the

7 See KA XVIII, p. 32, Nr. 138.

8 Because I am interested in presenting a portrait of how Fichte's philosophy was received by Schlegel, my exploration of Fichte's thought will be limited to the conception of philosophy that emerges from his early writings: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/5); *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie* (1794); and »Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre« (1797/8).

9 »Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre«, *Philosophisches Journal* VII (1797): 1–20.

same thing, a philosophical system) would have to begin with the pure I.«¹⁰ In order to explain consciousness, Fichte believed, we need to posit a consciousness in which subject and object are not parted, but rather united. Only such a unity stops an otherwise infinite regress. For if we think an object only as the product of a representing subject, the representing subject can be thought of as the object of another representing subject, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Yet, if we can isolate a moment in which subject and object are one, we will have reached an absolute starting point – an unmediated consciousness of our self. This unmediated consciousness of our self is »absolute« (*unhintergebar*) and is not a fact, but an activity.¹¹ This move from fact to act as the first principle for philosophy, freed him, or so Fichte thought, from the criticisms that had been leveled against Reinhold by Schulze. Fichte defines philosophy in terms of this identity of subject and object. He writes: »All possible consciousness, as objective and belonging to a subject, presupposes an immediate consciousness in which what is subjective and what is objective are simply [*schlechthin*] one and the same. Otherwise, consciousness is simply [*schlechthin*] incomprehensible. One will look in vain for a connection between subject and object if one does not grasp their unity. Hence, all philosophy which does not depart from the point at which they are united is necessarily shallow and incomplete and cannot explain what it should explain and so is not philosophy at all.«¹²

Fichte cannot conceive of philosophy that is not grounded upon a principle which guarantees a certain starting point, which in turn guarantees a completeness that would not otherwise be available, and which is required for something to *be* philosophy. As we shall see, Fichte's rejection of openness and incomprehensibility is not shared by Schlegel, who embraces

10 IWL p. 61/GA, p. 477.

11 Cf. »If philosophy begins with a fact, then it places itself in the midst of a world of being and finitude, and it will be difficult indeed for it to discover any path leading from this world to an infinite and supersensible one. If, however, philosophy begins with an Act, then it finds itself at the precise point where these two worlds are connected with each other and from which they can both be surveyed in a single glance« (IWL, p. 51/GA, p. 468). Also, »The only way in which a concept can be completely specified or determined is by indicating the act through which it comes into being« (IWL, p. 108/GA, p. 523).

12 IWL, p. 114/ GA, p. 528.

both, i.e., who believes that philosophy must contain incomprehensible aspects and is inherently incomplete.

Schlegel was well aware of Fichte's deeply dismissive attitude towards those who did not follow his method, describing Fichte as one who »idealized his enemies to model representatives of pure non-philosophy,« so that whoever was not engaged in philosophy in precisely the sense that Fichte defined it was not engaged in philosophy at all. Anyone who was not an idealist according to Fichte's terms was not a philosopher. Moreover, for Fichte not just any form of idealism will count as philosophy. The task of philosophy is to indicate the basis of experience (here Fichte shows his deep connections to Kant's transcendental idealism), but this does not entail any commitment to experience (indeed, to avoid Kant's troubling dualisms, Fichte breaks rather violently from Kant's empirical realism). Fichte claims that the identity of the I as both subject and object cannot be part of experience, yet it is the ground of all experience. For this reason: »[E]xperience is not something with which idealism is, as it were, acquainted in advance and which it keeps in view as the goal at which it has to arrive. In the course of its derivations, idealism knows nothing of experience and takes no heed of it whatsoever. It commences from its own starting point, and it proceeds in accordance with its own rule, without the slightest concern for what may ultimately result.«¹³

Fichte saw his philosophical contributions as an extension of Kant's philosophy, in particular of Kant's transcendental deduction; that is, he believed that his work helped solve the problem of establishing objective validity through the subjective conditions of representability. Fichte claimed to be answering the same questions as Kant's philosophy, more completely (and successfully) than Kant himself had.

Schlegel, in a review of the first volumes of the *Philosophisches Journal*, faults Fichte for not having given a »complete proof« (*einen vollständigen Beweis*) of this claim.¹⁴ And Fichte attempts to complete his proof in Section 6 of the second introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Fichte not only

¹³ *IWL*, pp. 31–32/*GA*, p. 446.

¹⁴ This review of the first four issues of Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal* was published in the *Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung*, 1798. See, »Rezension von Niethammers Philosophischen Journal,« *KA VIII*, pp. 11–32, esp., p. 26.

believed that his system was »none other than the Kantian system,« but also that it completed Kant's revolution.¹⁵

To complete the revolution begun by Kant, the problem of Kant's positing of a thing-in-itself as the necessary source for all experience needed to be addressed: Fichte believed that the thing-in-itself was unnecessary. Those philosophers who did not see this, and who insisted that the thing-in-itself was a necessary condition for the possibility of objective knowledge were dogmatists. According to Fichte, there are only two possible consistent explanations of experience: dogmatism (materialism/realism) and critical philosophy (idealism). According to Fichte, dogmatists believe they are in possession of cognitions of things-in-themselves, and so they endorse a type of metaphysical realism. This realism is defined in terms of determinism and so from Fichte's perspective, amounts to a flagrant affront to the concept of the freedom of the self-positing I which he champions in his own philosophy. Like Jacobi before him, Fichte sees in Spinoza's philosophy a model of the sort of determinism/fatalism that he finds threatening to the well-being of philosophy. For Fichte, Spinoza was a thinker focused upon things rather than the I, on substance rather than on the active subject. In Spinoza's system, the I is posited merely as a mode of being, subject to the laws of nature, with no access to the supersensible realm, and thereby robbed of its freedom.

Critical philosophy, on the other hand, turns dogmatism on its head: it asserts freedom as its starting point, hence the I takes priority over any concept of the thing, the subject is understood in terms of its activity rather than as a mere mode of being, and being is understood in terms of the activity of the I. In Fichte's idealism (which he insists is a form of critical rather than dogmatic philosophy), the Non-I is not a Kantian thing-in-itself beyond the reach of knowledge, but something which is opposed to the I by force of this I and hence very much within reach of the I.

Despite Fichte's insistence that his version of idealism was the only truly critical version of idealism, and that those who did not do philosophy according to the method indicated in the *Wissenschaftslehre* were dogmatists, Schlegel insisted that *Fichte* was indeed the dogmatist. He tells us that, »[in] the *Wissenschaftslehre* the method must be critical: but Fichte

15 IWP, p. 4/GA 420.

is not critical.«¹⁶ Why isn't Fichte critical? Because »absolute idealism without realism is mystical,« and the mystic is certainly no critic!¹⁷ Mysticism is no more than a proxy for philosophy which Schlegel describes as the abyss in which reality gets lost.

On Schlegel's reading, Fichte's philosophy is one-sided, and ultimately cannot accomplish what it needs to accomplish. Fichte goes both too far and not far enough in his *Wissenschaftslehre*: Fichte goes too far in pushing to establish the foundation of all philosophy, he is searching for an absolute ground of knowledge, yet such a search is both unnecessary and futile; it is unnecessary because, as we shall see, philosophy begins »in the middle« and it is futile, because »[t]o know already indicates a conditioned knowledge« and »[t]he unknowability of the Absolute is an identical triviality.«¹⁸ Yet, insofar as Fichte remains inside consciousness, he does not go far enough in his attempt to explain reality. As Schlegel himself puts this, »[Fichte] wants to demonstrate far too much and then far too little.«¹⁹

So, on Schlegel's reading, Fichte's critical idealism is not all that critical afterall; it is dogmatic. The truly critical philosopher will blend idealism with realism in order to avoid the limitations of one-sided approaches to reality. Moreover, philosophers who wish to avoid dogmatism will simply have to come to terms with the fact that there is no anchor to moor our beliefs and endow them with certainty. Now let us turn to the details of the position that Schlegel offered in the wake of his break from first principles.

2. Schlegel's Anti-Foundationalism

Schlegel endorsed anti-foundationalism in an attempt to capture the inherent incompleteness both of our knowledge and of philosophy itself. In the first book of the lectures on the history of philosophy, entitled *The Historical Characteristics of Philosophy according to its Successive Development*, Schlegel addresses the problem of where we begin when we philosophize: »To desire to provisionally prove what the beginning point of

16 KA XVIII, p. 8, Nr. 52.

17 KA XVIII, p. 33, Nr. 151; Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 37, Nr. 201.

18 KA XVIII, p. 511, Nr. 64.

19 KA XVIII, p. 32, Nr. 140.

philosophy is, concerns separating out the first principle of philosophy (if there is such a principle), as is actually attempted in some scientific introductions. One can admit that in a tentative treatment the point from which one must begin to philosophize will be searched for and proved.«²⁰

Of course, if there is no such principle, it will only be searched for and never found. In several fragments and in an essay, *On Incomprehensibility*, Schlegel stresses the value of incomprehension.²¹ Because our knowledge claims are never rooted in absolutely certain foundations, we should not be so arrogant as to think that we will ever have the last word on the meaning of any given event or text or idea, the remainder is that which is incomprehensible. Because Fichte believes that philosophy begins from an absolute foundation, complete comprehensibility is not only possible but demanded. Recall that he defines philosophy in terms of the »absolute comprehensibility« of consciousness. Because Schlegel rejects the possibility of an absolute foundation for philosophy, he embraces incompleteness and incomprehensibility and charges that those who want to explain everything become like popes in their own small domains, exhibiting the dogmatism born of *imposing* truth rather than *seeking* it.

Schlegel's particular breed of anti-foundationalism also has consequences for the role of history in philosophy. Schlegel's position is that we never begin with the certain knowledge that there is any first principle; instead we must begin with what we have – a history of what has been thought by other philosophers before. According to Schlegel, an introduction to philosophy can only be a critique of all earlier philosophy. Schlegel was captivated by the problem of introducing philosophy, and this is ultimately the problem of the beginning of philosophy. According to Schlegel, any attempt to begin with a pure point of certainty is impossible: »To entirely abstract from all previous systems and throw all of this away as Descartes

²⁰ KA XII, p. 110.

²¹ The reception of Schlegel's journal, *Das Athenäum*, was not warm. Many philosophers, especially those targeted in its pages, took offense at their portrayals. There were also frequent complaints about the *Unverständlichkeit* of the entries, especially the fragments. It became a kind of popular saying that, »Was man nicht versteht hat ein Schlegel geschrieben.« The essay *On Incomprehensibility*, published in the last issue of the journal, was a kind of swan song.

attempted to do is absolutely impossible. Such an entirely new creation from one's own mind, a complete forgetting of all which has been thought before, was also attempted by Fichte and he too failed in this.«²²

Prominent representatives of the modern European philosophical tradition such as Descartes and Fichte sought the foundation for philosophy in a lonely *cogito* or *Ich*, but Schlegel rejects this move and any attempt to isolate a single, fixed principle (whether that principle is understood as an activity or as a fact) underlying all of our knowledge claims. To »throw away« everything that has been developed by other philosophers or to »completely forget« all that has been thought before is to presume that philosophy can be done without attending to the history of philosophy. It is, according to Schlegel, impossible to do philosophy critically without doing the history of philosophy. This point, again, is intimately connected to his anti-foundationalism. He writes: »Our philosophy does not begin like the others with a first principle – where the first proposition is like the center or first ring of a comet – with the rest a long tail of mist – we depart from a small but living seed – our center lies in the middle.«²³

A philosophy such as Fichte's, which is based on first principles provides a perspective from the outside, that is, from a point that establishes all that follows from it. Such a position is foundational, with the first principle or foundation standing outside of the matter that it serves to explain. The first principle is fixed, static and presumably explains all the changing, living matter in the world, matter that, in Fichte's words, it need »take no heed of whatsoever.«²⁴ Schlegel's view of philosophy represents a radical departure from Fichte's foundationalist, ahistorical view of philosophy. Since we have no access to an obvious starting point for philosophy, we must begin with what we do have, a rather messy heap of what has been thought before. In *Athenäum Fragment 84*, Schlegel claims that, »philosophy, like epic poetry, always begins *in media res*.«²⁵ When we do philosophy, we are not starting from a position outside the ebb and flow of philosophical ideas, but in the midst of this dynamic process itself, *in me-*

22 KA XII, p. 111.

23 KA XII, p. 328.

24 IWL, p. 31/GA, p. 446.

25 KA II, p. 178.

dia res. Schlegel's move to »the inside« or »the middle« is a move towards taking the history of philosophy seriously and towards re-conceptualizing the very notion of critical philosophy in historical terms.

Schlegel describes the various philosophical systems that comprise the history of philosophy as links in a coherent chain, with an understanding of any given philosophical system requiring some understanding of the chain to which it is connected.²⁶ And for Schlegel, though wholes are important to him, a philosophical system has little to do with a »systematic derivation of consciousness as a whole,« in part because as we saw above, such a system, positioned »within consciousness« would remain one-sided. Moreover, Fichte's conception of system overlooks elements that are crucial to Schlegel's view that: »System is an integrated, connected whole of the matter of knowledge [*wissenschaftliche Stoff*] in a continuous mutual confirmation and organic coherence – a whole of a plurality that is in itself perfected and unified.«²⁷

In Schlegel's conception of a philosophical system, change and interaction are stressed, and organic coherence is the goal: a goal that no systematic derivation will achieve for us, and no single system either. The philosopher must work from a single system, that is, from one link in the chain of all systems, but always with a view towards the unity of which each system is but a part. This fluency between one's own system and the greater whole of which it is a part is stressed by Schlegel in the following fragment: »Every philosopher has his own line or tendency which is his departing point and his cycle. He who has a system is as lost as he who has none. One must therefore reconcile both.«²⁸

What is the philosopher to do with such a dilemma? Schlegel seems to damn the philosopher for having a system, yet doom her if she is without one. Beiser understands the dilemma presented by Schlegel in the following way: »On the one hand, it is dangerous to have a system, because it sets arbitrary limits to enquiry and imposes an artificial order on the facts. On the other hand, it is necessary to have a system, because unity and coher-

26 KA XII, p. 111.

27 KA 18, p. 12, Nr. 84.

28 KA XVIII, p. 80, Nr. 614. Cf. »It's equally fatal for the mind to have system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two« (KA II, p. 173, Nr. 53).

ence are essential to all knowledge and it is only in the context of a system that a proposition is justifiable.«²⁹

Beiser's emphasis on the relation between system, unity, and coherence is quite useful in helping us to understand the horns of Schlegel's dilemma, a dilemma that never even surfaces for a thinker like Fichte, whose system, standing in isolation from all else, is endowed with the certainty that a first principle and accompanying foundationalist method can grant.³⁰ In contrast, Schlegel's anti-foundationalism leads him to see philosophy as consisting of a plurality of systems, each of which can offer a piece of the whole of the system of knowledge, but never the complete system. No individual line or tendency constitutes a system in the sense of the »integrated, connected whole of the matter of knowledge« to which Schlegel makes reference. Schlegel rejects a foundationalist approach to the problem of knowledge and emphasizes the importance of coherence: we never have the last word on how to justify a claim, but we must try to bring our claims into some coherent scheme or whole. What goes for our own body of knowledge holds too of the body of knowledge that philosophers construct. And construct they do, but not via systematic derivations anchored in a firm foundation. Schlegel reads Fichte's emphasis on systematic derivations as an embrace of deduction, claiming that his demonstrations work by way of deduction and deduction is never as strong as construction.³¹

29 F. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 126.

30 While my concern in this paper is to present Schlegel's reading of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, it is only fair to point out that Schlegel's emphasis on the isolation of Fichte's *Ich* and of the entire *Wissenschaftslehre* is not shared by contemporary Fichte scholars. Consider Dan Breazeale's recent description of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (a description that would have put Schlegel right back under Fichte's spell): »Like the self it describes, the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* is a system that remains forever open to the ›infinite richness of experience.‹ For this is a philosophy that acknowledges the presence within the I itself, of a realm of irreducible otherness, absolute contingency, and ultimate incomprehensibility« (»Fichte's Abstract Realism,« in *The Emergence of German Idealism*, eds. Michael Baur and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, pp. 95–115, at p. 113 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999)).

31 Cf. KA XVIII, p. 36, Nr. 185: »Construction is far more than deduction«; *Ibid.*, p. 31, Nr. 129: »Deduction never has an end and should never have an end.« Of course, Fichte emphasizes »systematic derivation« and not deduction, and not all systematic derivation is deductive, so there are problems with Schlegel's charges that Fichte

Philosophy cannot *be* a science; it is only ever in the process of becoming a science. And it is not in the process of becoming a deductive science, in which truth can be derived absolutely, but something more like the art of constructing coherent schemes from our collection of beliefs. Recall the claim made in *Athenäum Fragment 216*: from Schlegel's perspective, Fichte's philosophy is only a *tendency*, a single contribution to the problem of how we come to have knowledge of the world, but it is only a push (albeit a revolutionary one) in the right direction, a leaning rather than an authoritative, final word on the matter of truth.

3. Fichte and Misguided Mystical Foundationalism

According to Schlegel's view of philosophy, the philosopher can point to tendencies, to probable states of affairs, to beliefs that cohere with one another, but she cannot uncover the absolute foundation of all knowledge. But, according to Schlegel, Fichte held that in order to be a »science of knowledge,« philosophy must be based upon an absolute first principle. Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* is, of course, his attempt to secure this principle and thereby solve the problem of philosophy's starting point. In this work, Fichte tirelessly reminds us that »philosophy has to display the basis or foundation of all experience.« This contrasts rather sharply with Schlegel's references to beginning »*in media res*.«

Schlegel grew into quite a strong critic of Fichte's idealism. For example, Schlegel faults Fichte for his attempt to derive all of reality from the self-positing act of consciousness.³² This, says Schlegel, is based upon a flawed view of the nature of philosophy: »If one postulates a system of knowledge (*Wissenschaft*) and searches for the conditions of its possibility, one falls into mysticism and the most consequential solution – the only possible one – from this point of view, is *the positing of an absolute I* – through which the form and content of an absolute theory of knowledge are given at once.«³³

is guilty of deduction.

32 Schlegel's reception is concentrated in two series of fragments entitled: *Zur Wissenschaftslehre* 1796 (KA XVIII, pp. 3–14, Nrs. 1–125) and *Geist der Wissenschaftslehre* 1797–1798 (KA XVIII, pp. 31–39, Nrs. 126–227).

33 KA XVIII, p. 7, Nr. 32.

Contrary to Fichte's own claim that the only truly critical philosophy had to be his version of idealism, Schlegel finds in Fichte's approach to philosophy heavy traces of dogmatism and mysticism and very little critical philosophy at all. He in fact, again with the characteristic *Frechheit* I have mentioned, likens Fichte to the pope, who arbitrarily posits what he will, and so can easily explain everything; he afterall has the key granting him »infallible power to open heaven and hell.«³⁴

Fichte's »mystical« errors can be avoided: he must take account of history and science so that his view of knowledge is not isolated from human reality. Idealism is empty if it is not connected to the concrete realities of the world. Schlegel defines philosophy as the »essence of all sciences.« Philosophy cannot be solely concerned with the structure of consciousness independently of experience; mystical idealism leaves us with philosophy as a »sophistical art.« Such a view of philosophy disregards history and other empirical data and is sharply at odds with Schlegel's view of the nature of philosophy.³⁵

Schlegel critiques Fichte's disinterest in any science which has an object and his corresponding antipathy to history, arguing that history is an essential part of philosophy and the search for knowledge. The very first fragment of the *Athenäum* gives expression to Schlegel's concern with making philosophy the subject of philosophy: »Nothing is more rarely the subject of philosophy than philosophy itself.«³⁶ To appreciate this claim, we must keep in mind that Schlegel was interested in making the *entire* tradition of philosophy the subject matter of philosophy, for he was well aware that other philosophers, even those who thought philosophy could begin with a first principle (e.g., Descartes and Fichte) had reflected on the nature of philosophy itself in developing their methods. But this was not enough: one had to approach philosophy historically in order to get a view of the whole, and so to *really* make philosophy the subject of philosophy. With characteristic irony (of just the sort that led so many of his contemporaries to misunderstand and dismiss him), Schlegel describes his push to criticize philosophy as just retaliation: »Since nowadays philosophy cri-

34 KA XVIII, p. 3, Nr. 2.

35 Cf. KA XVIII, p. 32, Nrs. 141, 143; p. 33, Nr. 148. See also, KA XXIII, p. 333 and KA II, p. 284.

36 KA II, p. 165, Nr. 1.

ticizes everything that comes in front of its nose, a criticism of philosophy would be nothing more than justifiable retaliation.«³⁷

Schlegel's charges against the limits of Fichte's »critical philosophy« are rooted both in his anti-foundationalism and in desire to develop a critical philosophy of philosophy itself.

A successful critique of philosophizing reason is a critique that places a given philosophical system into a context that allows us to understand its place in the history of ideas. And while certain philosophical points from different philosophical systems can be meaningfully compared in an ahistorical manner, to develop a critique of philosophy itself, one must trace the development and genesis of ideas and compare the development of various philosophical systems with others. A successful critique of philosophy requires a history of philosophy. When history is incorporated into the very method of philosophy itself, we can assess a given contribution of a philosopher, not only by *classifying* her arguments as valid or invalid, sound or unsound, but by *comparing* the merits of the any given contribution vis-à-vis contributions made by other philosophers from different periods. Schlegel's emphasis on history as essential to critique is part of his general view of philosophy as framed by life, as beginning *in media res*, in the midst of change and flux.

Fichte does not blend his philosophy with the philosophy of philosophy, and this is part of the error-riddled path which leads him to his ahistorical method.³⁸ A critical (as opposed to a dogmatic) philosopher must be engaged in a history of philosophy in order to go beyond his own particular system. According to Schlegel, Fichte does not do this, hence »The *Wissenschaftslehre* is a Fichtean presentation of the Fichtean spirit in Fichtean letters,« with both the spirit and the letter leading to foundationalism.³⁹

Concluding Remarks

Schlegel was deeply concerned with the problem of what philosophy can deliver and how it can deliver it. According to Schlegel, the only truly crit-

37 KA II, p. 173, Nr. 56. Cf. KA XVIII, p. 40, Nr. 228.

38 Cf. KA XVIII, p. 33, Nr. 143; KA XVIII, p. 34, Nr. 148; KA XVIII, p. 34, Nr. 163.

39 KA XVIII, p. 33, Nr. 144. Cf. KA XVIII, p. 3, Nr. 2.

ical philosophers were those who were willing to critique philosophy itself and who were, moreover, committed in *spirit and letter* to the anti-foundationalism which he believed provided the best general (even if not definitive) view for understanding human knowledge, a knowledge that would never end in anything like final words or absolute truths, and certainly never began with them either.

Ultimately, I think that Schlegel is justified in calling Fichte's level of »criticism« into question. The truly critical philosopher, on this reading, is not the German idealist, but the romantic skeptic.

Friedrich Schlegel's Transformation of Fichte's Transcendental into an Early Romantic Idealism*

Bärbel Frischmann

Few people today would stigmatize Romanticism as a sentimental, past-orientated movement. The more recent research-efforts show the modernity and innovative potential especially of Early Romantics (*Frühromantik*) and the great influence of romantic thought on 20th century poetic theory and philosophy.¹ Thus the interest of my paper is not to argue against the old Romanticism-picture. Rather I want to show the close connection of the Early Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel to the philosophy of German Idealism and Fichte in particular. My approach to the Early Romantics stresses its philosophical ambitions and contribution and is directed against a reductionist literary and aesthetic reading of it.

In the past, a clear distinction was made between idealism and romanticism. But the Early Romantics themselves described and understood their own philosophy explicitly as *idealism*.² They call it critical, absolute or transcendental idealism (Schlegel), magic idealism (Novalis), or intended a kind of aesthetic and poetical idealism. So in contemporary companions to German Idealism we often find sections dealing with *Early Romantic Philosophy*.³

* I am grateful to Jeffery Kinlaw and to Carola Freiin von Villiez for help with translation, and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert for proofreading.

1 Eldridge speaks about the »Persistence of Romanticism«, 2001.

2 In this point I don't agree with Frank's proposal, »zwischen dem Idealismus und der Frühromantik scharf zu unterscheiden« (1997, p. 859).

3 See for example Ameriks (ed.) 2000, Sandkühler (ed.) 2005.

It is important to see that Fichte is the philosopher with the deepest influence on Early Romantic philosophy. For this reason in my paper I deal with Friedrich Schlegel's early philosophy and some aspects of his critical reception of Fichte's philosophy.⁴

Part one provides some general information about the Early Romantics and some biographical remarks concerning Friedrich Schlegel. Part two draws out some main points of Schlegel's interpretation of idealism. In part three I would like to sketch the influence of Fichte's philosophy on Schlegel's thinking in a summary of points which are significant for Schlegel's philosophy. Schlegel's concept of irony as an important characteristic of his kind of philosophy I point out in part four separately.

1. The Early Romantic Movement

German Early Romantics covered the short period from the middle of the 1790s to the beginning of the 18th century. The main proponents, in theoretical respect, were the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. Because of some obvious parallels, Hölderlin can also be understood as closely related to the early German Romantics. Some specific aspects of their philosophical positions are:

- the close connection with Fichte,
- the idea of an autonomous, self-creating human being,
- a revolutionary, democratic political attitude,
- a strong scepticism about a scientific, systematic philosophy,
- the alternative concept of a fragmentary and ironical philosophy, especially in Fr. Schlegel,
- a strong tendency towards a historical and hermeneutical philosophy,
- the programme of the synthesis of philosophy, poetry and, later, religion (it culminates in the idea of a New Mythology),
- the notion of an infinite progress of mankind and the idea of a »Golden Age«.

Friedrich Schlegel, first of all, was a self-confident, provocative, experimental and critical thinker. His philosophical work contains philosophical essays and reviews, philosophical fragments and notebooks, 5 philosophic-

4 For a detailed investigation into Schlegel's Fichte-reception see Frischmann 2005.

al lectures (the first from 1800/01 was titled »*Transscendentalphilosophie*«, the other were read in 1804/05 and 1805/06 and at the end of his life in 1828 and 1829).

In 1795 he began to study Fichte's philosophical writings and was very impressed by Fichte's philosophy of freedom and subjectivity. He regarded Fichte as the greatest philosopher of the epoch and one of the greatest philosophers of all times. With this admiration he didn't stand alone. Many contemporaries celebrated Fichte for his strong revolutionary and freedom-orientated pathos. Friedrich Schlegel went to Jena in 1796. He met Fichte, visited his lectures and had personal contact with Fichte. When Fichte wanted to leave Jena because of the Atheism quarrel (Atheismusstreit) in 1799, Schlegel helped him get a foothold in Berlin. Still after the turn of the century Schlegel wrote that Fichte had first established the principles of liberty scientifically and that he had discovered the right method of the philosophy quite alone. (KA III, 6) In this period of his work Schlegel dealt with Fichte's philosophy in nearly all of his theoretical writings and a lot of his fragments in his notebooks focused upon Fichte. There cannot be any doubt about the philosophical influence Fichte had on Schlegel.⁵

But, some years later, after his conversion to Catholicism, he criticized the empty abstractions in Fichte's philosophy (KA XIX, 103, 192), his idolization of the »I« (KA XIX, 327, 197), the vainness of an arbitrary and bottomless reason, the arrogance of self-thinking (KA XIX, 176, 186). God had now taken the place of the reason in Schlegel's philosophy. In this life phase Schlegel had left his early philosophy.

In the following I deal with Schlegel's work until 1800 and stress it as *Early Romanticism* to delimit it from his later, conservative and Christian-orientated period.

5 See also Beiser: »If we consider Schlegel's development in the light of his notebooks and his general intellectual context in Jena, it becomes clear that the decisive factor in his conversion to romanticism was his *critique* of Fichte's philosophy« (2003, p. 107).

2. *The Romantic Understanding of Idealism*

The era from 1770 to 1840 which is called the age of »German Idealism« is of high intellectual complexity. Today we speak also of »Classical German Philosophy« because in this period philosophers, writers, artists, politicians developed the basics, i.e. the fundamental ideas, vocabularies and methodologies, dominating or influencing at least the world-view, and intellectual standards of the following two centuries.

German Idealism is based on common anthropological views: In an infinite, becoming world man is thought of as formable, active and self-creating. In accordance with this, one can read in Fichte's *Naturrecht*: Human beings have not »any determinacy but only an infinite determinability« (NR, 74); they would not be formed »but would be only formable« (ibid.); »all animals are complete and finished; the human being is only intimated and projected« (ibid.).

»Every animal is what it is: only the human being is originally nothing at all. He must become what he is to be: and, since he is to be a being for himself, he must become this through himself. Nature completed all of her works; only from the human being did she withdraw her hand, and precisely by doing so, she gave him over to himself. Formability, as such, is the character of humanity« (ibid.).

The concept of perfectibility or formability implies two aspects: the openness of the human species, of human history, and the openness, indeterminacy, of each human individual. In this context the concept of infinite perfectibility is used to describe the desubstantiation of the subject-position and the dispersion of an essentialist picture of the human being.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* provides the epistemological application of the anthropological assumptions. The *Wissenschaftslehre* is based upon the principle of the freely acting subject, the so-called self-positing I. Fichte was convinced that he could show that and how the absolute, self-positing I constitutes our representations and this means: how consciousness constitutes »reality«. This constitution has two conditions: It isn't an arbitrary action, but a legal one. And the action of the »I« is based on an outer check (*Anstoß*). These are necessary characteristics or implications of »transcendental idealism«.

In many of his early fragments, Schlegel described Fichte as »Kantianer« and Fichte's philosophy as transcendental philosophy. He equated transcendental philosophy with idealism. A truthful and critical idealism is

transcendental philosophy. Such an idealism is, as Schlegel maintained, the foundation of all philosophy (KA XVIII, 93, 761). Schlegel stressed Fichte's theory of the non-substantial, self-constituting I and interpreted this I as the fundamental assumption of idealism. In many notes, Schlegel took a position on this and emphasized the self-determination and self-formation of the autonomous, reasonable subject.

The background of Fichte's epistemological position is a philosophy of *freedom*, which Fichte also worked out in his moral and legal philosophy. For Fichte freedom in acting and recognizing is the decisive feature of man. And idealism is based on the reason-determination of freedom. (GA I, 4, 252; SW I, 499).

Schlegel also declared that true idealism designs the universe and shows how we make it. (KA XVIII, 140, 219) He identified Fichte's idealism with the production of reason which is artificial and itself reflecting. (KA XII, 138) Schlegel connected freedom and intellectual activity with idealism. Such an intellectual activity is the prerequisite for philosophy and poetry. And Schlegel appreciated idealism as the peculiarity of his own age. (KA II, 313) He took the invention of idealism as a result of the political and cultural revolution which took place at his time. (KA III, 96)

In the *Wissenschaftslehre* Fichte demonstrated that intuition is the undetermined and free capability of the I. The intuition exceeds the existing limits, driven by an inner striving. It was the imagination primarily that became a decisive epistemic authority for Early Romanticism.

Because human activity would reach no definite, final result, because striving will continue, Fichte and the Romantics conceded an unsatisfied yearning⁶. From this results the romantic slogan: »yearning for the infinity«. In this perspective Schlegel defined idealism as a consciousness of the infinite. Hegel then will demote this fundamental romantic view as »unhappy consciousness«.

Approximately from 1806 to 1808 Schlegel's change of his position became obvious. Now he held the opinion that the new, intellectual idealism would lead back to the old, divine idealism, which can not be invented, but only found again. (KA III, 98) Such a find again could be the new mythology which Schlegel just like Novalis, Schelling, Hölderlin, the young Hegel, hoped for. In connection with the demand for a new mythology

6 Beiser translates »longing« (2003, p. 109).

Schlegel claimed that idealism is a confirmation for the possibility of mythology. (KA II, 313)

What is important in this view is that Schlegel connected idealism with creative mental activity, how it is necessary in poetry, mythology, religion, philosophy and science. This idealism is not a formal procedure, but a structure of the mind and a kind of attitude. (KA III, 99) Such a kind of idealism cannot have its ideal in any systematic form.

At this point, I turn to a look at Schlegel's critique of Fichte's philosophy.

3. Schlegel's Criticism and Antifoundationalism

In many of his fragments und writings Schlegel dealt with the question of what the task of philosophy is. Schlegel's judgment on this matter and on Fichte in particular is very complex and often ambivalent. For example:

Schlegel appreciated Fichte for his critical spirit, but on the other hand he reproached him for not being critical enough.

Schlegel pointed out Fichte's genetic thinking. But he criticized the *Wissenschaftslehre* as too narrow, because Fichte deduced only formal principles. (KA XVIII, 32f., 143) He missed an education-theory which explains how the I develops.

On the one hand, Schlegel recognized Fichte's floating terminology and his synthetical method, on the other hand, he required a plurality of methods.

Interesting is Schlegel's attempt to typologize the philosophy of his time. He conceived a historical sequence of theories: »*Elementarphilosophie*«, transcendental philosophy, absolute philosophy, cyclical system. (KA XVIII, 128, 71) In his opinion, Kant is more an »*Elementarphilosoph*«, Fichte a transcendental philosopher. Whereas, as Schlegel explained, the transcendental philosophy is indicated by a dialectical relation between subject and object, I and Non-I, Ideal and Real, the absolute philosophy puts god or another absolute principle over all these features. The transcendental is agile, is activity, the absolute is immovable and fixed.

Schlegel conceded that it was Fichte »who had discovered the foundation of the critical philosophy, and who had created a complete and consistent system of idealism«. ⁷ But Schlegel's critique of Fichte aimed at the

7 See Beiser 2003, p. 120.

request for philosophy to be a strictly deductive system. In Schlegel's mind, a systematized philosophy stops being philosophy. He reproached Fichte for the fact that his philosophy is too mathematical and not yet historical enough. (KA XVIII, 32, 141) A historical philosophy has some specific tasks: it should be able to show the becoming of theories and concepts and it should be conceived in a way which takes into account the changeability of theories and concepts.

As an alternative Schlegel also proposed a cyclical philosophy. He wrote: »Philosophy is still moving too much in a straight line; it's not yet cyclical enough.«⁸ (PF 23, 43) Schlegel favoured a cyclical system, a kind of systematic thinking without fixed structure, which challenges us to ever new interpretations. The cyclical system could be something like hermeneutics, an ever new trying of interpretation. Thinking cyclically means thinking relatively and historically. (KA XVIII, 417, 1149)

Such a cyclical system is one of the alternatives Schlegel looked for in his critique of the concept of systematic philosophy. This critique implied some far-reaching conceptual ideas. Their common intention was to strengthen the relativity, perspectivity and historicity of philosophy. Especially a new concept of »irony« seemed ideal for this purpose. (See chapter 4. Irony)

Schlegel criticized the systematic form as a fundamental mistake because it leads to a fixed and dead object. Schlegel regarded this as wrong because all things, nature, society, culture, language, should be thought of as in a continuous development. There is no final stage but only an infinite becoming. This was Schlegel's basic idea to describe the world. Therefore he tried ways of thinking and theories which could do justice to this idea of becoming and development. All of his methodological and conceptual experiments were aimed in this direction.

According to Schlegel, every philosophy should be seen as individual, as an original view. There isn't any generally obligatory theory. Philosophy is experimental thinking. So Schlegel developed different strategies to reach a relativization and pluralization of philosophy. One of these strategies is his concept of a »fragmentary system«. The fragment, for Schlegel, was a suitable presentation of a totality, of a system. Totality oc-

8 »Die Philosophie geht noch zu sehr grade aus, ist noch nicht zyklisch genug« (KA II, 171, 43).

curs as and in fragments. Even the best and most expansive system is only a fragment. (KA XVI, 163, 930)

The special capacity of the fragment consists in its relative completeness. A fragment is a mental whole. It is a living idea (KA XVIII, 139, 204), open for diverse interpretations. The combination of fragments constitutes a semantic network, something like a fragile system. »Every system grows out only from fragments.«⁹ Schlegel described his own philosophy as »a system of fragments and a progression of projects«¹⁰. Such a philosophy is, according to Schlegel, a romantic philosophy. (KA XVIII, 97, 815)

This philosophical view of fragments articulates the principal incompleteness of our knowledge and the giving up of the demand of an adequate representability of reality.¹¹

Another critique of systematic philosophy was directed at the demand of one single general principle or starting point of deduction. Schlegel required a »changing principle« (*Wechselgrundsatz*). For Schlegel, philosophy should have *two* centres, like an ellipse, or even more. In this way the movement of thoughts is possible and necessary. It is a movement between these centres, a movement in different orbits and directions with infinite thinking possibilities. We should have to imagine a system as other than linearly and logically organized. Rather, such a system should be thought of as an infinite process of relating.

A further demand of Schlegel consisted in the program of a synthesis between philosophy and poetry. In Schlegel's view, the basic fault of the age was to want to degrade philosophy to a science. (KA VIII, 84) Rather philosophy should be understood in a way like poetry.

»The whole history of modern poetry is a running commentary on the following brief philosophical text: all art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one.«¹² (PF 14, 115)

9 »Jedes System *wächst* nur aus Fragmenten« (XVI, 126, 496).

10 »Meine Philosophie ist ein System von Fragmenten und eine Progreßion von Projekten« (KA XVI, 126, 496).

11 »The Romantic fragment cannot be thought properly except it is seen to articulate a problematic relative to the transcendental idea of totality« (Gasché, foreword, in: PF, p. XXX).

12 »Die ganze Geschichte der modernen Poesie ist ein fortlaufender Kommentar zu dem kurzen Text der Philosophie: Alle Kunst soll Wissenschaft, und alle Wissenschaft soll Kunst werden; Poesie und Philosophie sollen vereinigt sein« (KA II, 161, 115).

Poetry gives a rich, open and flexible vocabulary. Poetry is not determined by fixed principles and literal standards. »Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry.«¹³ (PF 31, 116) Schlegel accentuated poetry's self-grounding and the revolt against philosophical domination. Poetry has its own principles. »Poetry can only be criticized by way of poetry.«¹⁴ (PF 14, 117)

Performances of poetry are the intellectual creativity, the variety of language possibilities, the free unfolding (*Entfaltung*) of the imagination. Special performances of philosophy, however, are: conceptual strictness, striving for knowledge, general public, reflection of the own basis. With the demand to connect philosophy and poetry, both areas shall participate in the advantages of the other one. The limit diffused.

On the one hand, poetry gets epistemic relevance and reflexive competence. Poetry which critically reflects on itself is transcendental poetry. In this strategy, Schlegel referred to the example of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which Fichte defined as a reflection of reflection, knowledge of knowledge etc. Such a »transcendental poetry« is a self-reflecting thinking. It's »poetry of poetry«¹⁵ (PF, 51, 238).

On the other hand, philosophy – implementing poetic possibilities – gains a larger methodical spectrum and conceptual freedom. Philosophy is consciousness of the infinite. Poetic means, like the allegory, make it possible to be included as an undetermined representative for this infinite one. The truth is relative, it is produced. All knowledge is represented symbolically and, therefore, it is dependent on our symbolic forms. (KA XVIII, 417, 1149)

Once again, Fichte's concept of the free imagination and his doctrine of striving proved to be very important for this demand for a connection between philosophy and poetry.

4. Irony

Schlegel's concept of irony and ironic philosophy was and just is the most provocative aspect of his thinking. His idea of irony resulted mainly from

13 »Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie« (KA II, 182, 116).

14 »Poesie kann nur durch Poesie kritisiert werden« (KA II, 162, 117).

15 See KA II, 204, 238.

his investigations in modern poetry, his dealing with Plato, and the transcendental philosophy of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. Irony developed to be a central motive and mode of Romantic theory (Jean Paul, Wilhelm Friedrich Solger) and poetry (Ludwig Tieck, E.T.A. Hoffmann).¹⁶

I can only try to give a first idea of Schlegel's concept of irony here. A collection of typological criteria for what Irony is able to do could involve the following aspects:

Schlegel transformed irony from a rhetorical instrument into a universal theoretical, poetical and philosophical principle and method and fundamental mental disposition and attitude. For Schlegel irony seemed to be the best framework for the description of human beings (i.e. subjectivity) and the world and a key function of modern thinking.

Irony is a dialectical thinking of differences or within differences. Irony means the possibility of various combinations, compilations, interpretations. Other formulations speak of paradoxical, chemical, cyclical, witty thinking. Truth is not fixable, it is the movement between poles: »Join the extremes and you will find the true middle.«¹⁷ (PF, 100, 74) The »permanent parabasis«¹⁸ (i.e. the transcending of a given situation or matter) should not be a decision but an »as well as«, an »oscillation between .«, for example between self-creation and self-destruction, enthusiasm and scepticism, finiteness and infinity. Here we can see the influence of Fichte's concept of the synthetical work of the imagination. But, in Schlegel's concept, the ironical hovering between poles or opposites also dissolves the boundaries between discourses, genres, disciplines, cultural realms: they are all inferior in isolation.

Irony demands a mentally active, imagining, creative subject, a subject, which was conceptualized in the transcendental philosophy Kant's and Fichte's.

Irony requires a reflective distance and self-distance; a »mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all limitations, even above its own art, virtue, or genius«¹⁹ (PF 6, 42). This model of reflection is incon-

16 See also Behler: »irony is a phenomenon intimately related to the Romantic movement in all of its phases and in all its various national manifestations« (1988, p. 43).

17 »Verbindet die Extreme, so habt ihr die wahre Mitte« (KA II, 263, 74).

18 »Die Ironie ist eine permanente Parekbase« (KA XVIII, 85, 668).

19 Schlegel described irony as »die Stimmung, welche alles übersieht, und sich über alles Bedingte unendlich erhebt, auch über eigne Kunst, Tugend, oder Genialität«

ceivable without Fichte. But Schlegel also went beyond Fichte with his concept of irony.

Irony is used to criticize a systematic, scientific understanding of philosophy. It drops the demand for logical consistency, for coherent, logical argumentation. Because we have no set of fixed categories or scientific procedures. There is no way of producing a definite and absolute truth, since other productions, other tools, other interpretations will get other results. Knowledge is as experimental as our whole life. »Irony is universal experiment.« (KA XVIII, 217, 279)

Irony is scepticism toward truth. Irony carries out the permanent destruction of the illusion of knowledge: Irony throws the reader, the communication partner, into a state of uncertainty. Irony asserts methodological confusion, irritation, deviation [Abweichung]. There are no primary concepts, terms, qualifications which could be used as guiding principles. Irony is a thinking of plurality and contingency.

Irony denies the correspondence of word and object, significant and signified, symbol and symbolized. Irony stands for a radically contextualized production of meaning. The contents surpass each other, they glide.²⁰ All interpretational work appears as a fluctuating, endless, cyclical, historicizing and relativizing process. Schlegel emphasized the interactional process of understanding. It requires »*Sympoesie*«, »*Symphilosophie*«.

Irony is a precursor of postrepresentational discourse and post-mimetic art. Irony announces a philosophical and poetical shift of paradigm.

It is at least highly difficult to undertake a content analysis of irony. In best ironical manner, there is no final description or definition, but rather a terminological and conceptual uncertainty, if not confusion. In Schlegel's explications we find, for example, pleas for: fragmentation, chaos, incompleteness, flux, dissolution, a-systematicity, negativity, ambiguity, dissolving, agility.

Finally, I would like to ask: Why is such a philosophy of interest which presents as central topics for example: chaos, fragment, irony? And not: system, order, logic?

The ironic kind of philosophy shows *one* possibility to make allowances for the modern open conception of the world. The modern world

(KA II, 152, 42).

20 See Finlay 1988. She credits Schlegel for his new understanding of irony with regard to the »crisis of representation« in epistemology, arts and language.

view is based on the idea of infinity. All natural processes and human history are considered as open-ended. We are on the road, so to speak, without telos. Human beings must create the norms of their acting, thinking and speaking. They are free and must decide how to use their freedom. The philosophy of irony, of fragments, of an experimental thinking, is Schlegel's influential proposal for describing modernity and subjectivity. And this ironical mode of thinking should not be seen as irrational, but rather as a special kind of rationality itself. In that way Early Romantic philosophy can be understood as a critical reception, productive modification and creative transformation of those central issues, which signify the transcendental philosophy of Kant and Fichte.

We find a lot of shared premises of all kinds of German Idealism, but also a lot of differences which make it necessary, in my opinion, to subdivide German Idealism into various types: the transcendental (Kant and Fichte), the religious (Jacobi), the early romantic (Schlegel, Novalis), the absolute (Schelling, Hegel), and so on.

Transcendental idealism tried to take control over the openness and infinity by means of a priori structures within consciousness, absolute idealism presupposed an organizing principle of totality. Early Romantic Idealism made the modern proposal to give up the whole claim to realize such a universal, final-foundation programme and therefore has strong affinities to later, contemporary philosophies such as Nietzsche, deconstructivism, post-structuralism, and contingency-philosophy à la Rorty.

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Sound Reasoning: Fichtean Elements in Wilhelm von Humboldt's Philosophy of Language

David Kenosian

Those who have tried to determine sources of influence on Wilhelm von Humboldt's philosophy of language have generally focused on Kant. Michael Losonsky notes that as early as 1788, Humboldt discussed the relation between reason and sensibility in Kant with Jacobi.¹ In his essay »Über den Geschlechtsunterschied und dessen Einfluß auf die organische Natur« from 1794, he argues that dynamic forces (»Kräfte«) produce natural forms and give rise to intellectual life.² I contend that Humboldt eventually sought in language a Fichtean resolution to this set of Kantian dualisms. To be sure, his major work on language *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues* lacks the systematic rigor of the three Critiques and the *Wissenschaftslehre*- it consists of essays that were collected and published posthumously- but in them Humboldt makes a series of attempts to unite the theoretical and the practical. He describes language as the simultaneous self-activity of all individuals and as one and inseparable from intellectual activity.³ And intellectual activity should be understood in the broadest possible terms: Humboldt sees language as related to the

1 Michael Losonsky, introduction to *On Language* by Wilhelm von Humboldt, trans. Peter Heath, ed. Michael Losonsky (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xxv.

2 See Wilhelm von Humboldt, vol. 1 *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Albert Leitzmann, 17 vols. (Berlin: Behr, 1903–36), 311–34. In the essay Humboldt states that self-active (male) powers couple with receptive (female) to produce new life. The articulated sound represents the union of intellectual content (the concept) and sensuous form (sound). The closest analogue in the essay to language in his later writing is the creative genius in whom all powers are united (317).

total mental power of thinking, feeling and willing (7: 39–40). Surprisingly, there has been relatively less discussion of the influence of the post-Kantians on Humboldt. Kurt Müller-Vollmer traces the development Humboldt's philosophy of language to his essay on art, »Über die Einbildungskraft« from 1798, which was influenced by Kant's as well as by Fichte's philosophy.⁴ Humboldt's interest in Fichte's philosophy goes back to 1794 when he studied the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* with Schiller while the latter was working on *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*.⁵ But over time, his admiration was tempered by a more critical view, though not a rejection of Fichte's *Ich*. In a letter to Karl Gustav Brinkmann from 1803, Humboldt contends that Fichte's theory of the absolute *Ich* cancels out the real I.⁶ Much as he had once hoped to find an anthropological resolution to Kantian dualisms, Humboldt began to seek an empirical basis for the intellectual activity of the real *Ich's* that constitute the social. The true a priori ought to be, he believed, the force in the individual (»die Kraft im Menschen«) which brings about a synthesis of the empirical and the intellectual; the individual would at the same time become an instance of the universal, the unifying category of humanity (»die Menschheit«). This force or energy reveals itself on three levels of activity: observation and experience; drawing ideas from these experiences and assimilating the ideas (*Briefe*, 156). The inclusion of experiences, pleasures and sensations in metaphysics would, he hoped, enrich philosophy: »... (A)n die Stelle des: Abgezogenen und reinen ... müssen die menschlicher-

3 For the discussion on self-activity, see Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues* in vol. 7 *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Albert Leitzmann, 17 vols., (Berlin: Behr, 1903–36), 38. For his account on the identity of intellectual and linguistic activity, see *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7:53. Hereafter I will cite this text by volume and page number.

4 Klaus Müller-Vollmer, »Von der Poetik zur Linguistik- Wilhelm von Humboldt und der romantische Sprachbegriff,« in *Universalismus und Wissenschaft im Werk und Wirken der Brüder Humboldt*, ed. Klaus Hammacher (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 228–9.

5 Kurt Müller-Vollmer, »Poesie und Einbildungskraft: Zur Dichtungstheorie Wilhelm von Humboldts,« in *Poesie und Einbildungskraft*, ed. Kurt Müller-Vollmer (Stuttgart: J. M. Metzler, 1967), 86. Humboldt also attended Fichte's lectures in Jena. See his diary entry from May 30, 1794 in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 14: 246.

6 Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Wilhelm von Humboldt's Briefe an Karl Gustav von Brinkmann*, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Leipzig: Verlag von Karl W. Hiersmann, 1939). 154–5. This work will hereafter cited as *Briefe*.

en und belebenderen Ausdrücke des Allverknüpfen, des Ganzen und Vol-len treten« (Briefe 156). Humboldt's focus on expressions anticipate his later thought in which language is the vehicle of sociability and the primary medium of intellectual growth.

In this essay, I assess how Humboldt's philosophy of language developed from his engagement with Fichte's thought. A closer look at Fichte's thinking will give us an even better understanding of the phenomenology of language, above all of the fundamental characteristic of language in Humboldt's philosophy: the role of articulated sound as the bearer of concepts. In this essay, I propose that it is the sonority of language that enables members of a community to recognize each other as subjects and to share concepts over time. Interpersonality, as analyzed by Reinhard Lauth, is at the same time a model for the community's dialogical understanding of nature.⁷ Finally, I show that reason is for Humboldt a reflection on the tonal (formal) connections of articulated representations and, thus, its closest analogue is music or lyric poetry.

The contours of Humboldt's intellectual community appear already in his essay »Über die Einbildungskraft«: the artist (sender), audience (receiver), nature (their common referent) and the artwork, in particular poetry, that presents the artist's image of nature. The imagination grasps the unifying conception of objects by separating the essential from what is accidental or merely unimportant. At the same time, it arouses and determines the activity of other faculties. Artists reconstruct nature as an image (»Bild«) according to the laws of our thoughts and feelings and to render the image as an organic whole.⁸ The work speaks to the emotions of readers who are then inspired to recreate the work in their minds. In so doing they transcend the ordinary experiential limits of space and time, or as Humboldt would have it, they have the sense of being simultaneously in nature and lifted above it.⁹ This intellectual elevation causes us to see nature's »image to us« from a fresh perspective.

Poetry represents an appeal from the writer to the reader to engage in free activity and is therefore analogous to Fichte's notion of the solicitation

7 Reinhard Lauth, *Transzendente Entwicklungslinien von Descartes bis zu Marx und Dostojewski* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1989.), 180–195.

8 »Wilhelm von Humboldt, »Über die Einbildungskraft,« in *Poesie und Einbildungskraft*, ed. Klaus Müller-Vollmer (Stuttgart: J. M. Metzler, 1967), 145.

9 *Ibid.*, 134

(»*Aufforderung*«). There has been little if any discussion of this concept with regard to Humboldt's philosophy of language but I would argue that we can best understand the connection between inter-subjectivity and the social construction of nature in Humboldt's thinking if we look at the solicitation (or summons). As Günter Zöller notes, Fichte considers it to lie at the origin of our entire mental activity (i.e. theoretical as well as practical); the solicitation is more fundamental than the cognitive encounter with the object on the basis of feeling.¹⁰ Fichte remarks that the first representation I can have is »that of being summoned, as an individual, to engage in an act of free willing.«¹¹ We experience it as a call to limit our volitional activity. At the same time, the »*Aufforderung*« is a solicitation to freedom: by limiting our real activity to a particular sphere, we determine ourselves through reference to rational beings outside of ourselves (FTP 313). The summons to an »ought« must appear as a perception, specifically, »the perception to act upon and in reciprocal interaction with other rational beings« (FTP 452). Because I view myself in a sensibilized form, I also view the solicitation (»this ought«) in a sensible form (FTP 452). Since the solicitation is an instance of sensible acting, we infer that the rational being outside of us who issues the solicitation possesses a sensuous force of its own (FTP 457).

One of Fichte's examples of self-limitation is in fact a dialogue. When someone addresses me, I refrain from using my speech organs so that I can listen to my conversation partner. My response is reply to the summons to attach something to a series of acting (FTP 455). The dialogue between two individuals is only one link in a single large chain of activity conducted by other individuals in the rational community. This interaction is the basis of our cognition of nature: Fichte observes that our awareness of objects is connected with an awareness of other human beings (FTP 448). The other has a physical force which also appears to me as something sensible, namely as a materially limited body (FTP 457). Move-

10 Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy. The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 119.

11 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) Nova Methodo* (1796/99), ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 351. I will hereafter cite this work as FTP.

ments of the body are described as »articulations« (FTP 459).¹² When I recognize that the articulated body is part of nature, I realize that nature is divisible and determinable (FTP 460).¹³

For Fichte and Humboldt alike, articulations of force or language production disclose the status of the individual in the community. Humboldt describes language as a producing (»*energeia*«) in the social domain (7: 46). It is, he stresses, through sound that individuals become aware of other rational beings: »The articulate sound is torn from the breast to awaken in an other individual an echo returning to the ear. Man thereby at once discovers that around him there are beings having the same inner needs, and thus capable of meeting the manifold longing that resides in his feelings. For the intimation of a totality, and the endeavor towards it, are given immediately with the sense of individuality [...]« (7: 36–7).

To paraphrase Fichte, articulated sound is the sensible manifestation of the other's force that limits the I. By discovering that it is limited, the I becomes conscious of itself as an I (FTP 450.) In Humboldt's view, it is not only the content of others' expressions that limits the individual, but also sound. Indeed, sound is the precondition of knowing that we are member

12 According to the Krause manuscript, the terms Fichte used were »der articulierte Leib« and »Artikulation.« See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo. Kollegnachschrift K. chr. Fr. Krause 1798/99*, ed. Erich Fuchs (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1982), 235.

13 Cf. »The existence of something within nature has to be demonstrated by starting with the articulation [of the body]« (FTP 461). Humboldt does examine human corporeality in his philosophy of language, but this topic has received little scholarly attention. One exception is the work of Helmut Müller-Sievers who examines the impact of epigenesis on Humboldt's linguistic research in his *Epigenesis. Naturphilosophie im Sprachdenken Wilhelm von Humboldts* (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna: Schöningh, 1993). Epigenetic theory tries to explain the immanent capacity of natural beings to transform themselves and this capacity is defined by Humboldt as a force, by Fichte and others as a drive (»Trieb«). Müller-Sievers is primarily concerned with force as the source of intellectual energy and linguistic activity in Humboldt's theory (96). In other words, he sees the epigenetic model as a paradigm for a psycho-linguistic account of Humboldt's philosophy. But speaking and listening are also physical acts for Humboldt: »The transformation of sound is subject to two laws [...] . The one is a purely organic law that arises from the vocal organs and their collaboration [...] . The other is given by the intellectual principle of language [...] (7: 71). The analysis of corporeality in Humboldt's philosophy of language would be beyond the scope of this study.

of a specific community because it has a special penetrating power that enables the thoughts and feelings of others enter our minds through their speech. Language is tied to individuality by such close »links that it must repeatedly attach the same links to the mind of the listener in order to be fully understood. The whole individuality of the speaker is therefore carried over by language into the listener, not to repress the latter's individuality, but in order to produce from his identity and otherness a new and fruitful contrast« (7: 179).

The voice (*Stimme*) of the other therefore serves as a stimulus to the self. In response to an interlocutor's words, individuals determine themselves (*sich bestimmen*) to engage in activity. Language is the basis of communal life—it preserves the ideas, values and memories of a culture—and therefore is the historical and ever-changing relation between the individual and the community. The activity of speakers is both free and determinate: determinate because their linguistic community impresses a certain perspective (*Weltansicht*) upon their intellectual life but free because they modify the meaning of common terms when they use words express their innermost feelings and unique experiences. In this way, language actually widens the differences between individuals even though their statements are mutually intelligible. And it is the tonal character of language that furnishes individuals with intellectual freedom: Humboldt argues that sound allows for individual alteration of meaning conveyed by emphasis, intonation or emotional coloration (7:54). Hence, a dialogue between two individuals is an exchange in which common terms are continually reinterpreted. Humboldt likens this negotiation to a musical performance. »[Language] can unite the most diverse individuals [...] . [T]he word does not contain something already fixed, unlike a substance, nor a closed concept, it merely provokes the user to form this kind of concept under his own power (»Kraft«). People do not understand each other [...] by mutually occasioning each other (»sich gegenseitig bestimmen«) to produce exactly the same concept, they do it by touching in one another the same link in the chain of their sensory representations and internal conceptualizations, by striking the same note on their mental instruments whereupon corresponding but not identical concepts are engendered in each« (7: 169–70).

What ensures communicability is a multi-faceted conception of harmony. The articulation of our ideas and feelings conveys a stimulus (»die harmonisch stimmende Anregung«) that gives rise to harmony among

speakers (7: 56). In terms that evoke Fichte's solicitation, Humboldt explains that connected to the terms used by each speaker is a demand (*Forderung*) for more presentation and development. This demand is transferred to the listener »who is bidden [...] in his own mind to supply the missing element in harmony with what is given« (7: 180). At the same time, language interacts with universally shared mental faculties such as intuition and understanding. Thus, harmony also comprises the inner consonance of language with our mental faculties (sensory representations and internal conceptualizations). The highest level of reflective consciousness in language is inseparable from what he calls the purest attunement (»*Zusammenstimmung*«) of all our mental capacities (7: 157). When we engage in intellectual activity, our faculties literally work in concert. The implicit notion of harmony that obtains in Humboldt's account of the dialogue recalls Leo Spitzer's analysis of the term »*Stimmung*« that he traces back to medieval and Greek conception of world harmony. Spitzer argues that in German Romanticism, the term presupposes a whole of the soul or »fugitive moods« within the entire range of feelings.¹⁴ He links *Stimmung* to the adjectival form *gestimmt*, to be in agreement with or to be in a state of mind. The notion of *Stimmung* is a more fundamental term for Humboldt than the others he uses for feelings, sensations, and states of mind such as *Gefühl*, *Empfindung*, or *Gemüt*. *Stimmung* is the only one that encompasses our affective or intellectual response to the world and our externalized productive activity (the projection of the voice) into the world.¹⁵

In short, the exchanges between conversation partners constitute a process of mutual determination (*sich bestimmen*) that can be likened to the efforts of two musicians to attune (*abstimmen*) their mental instruments to each other. The dialogue also makes it possible for us to experience

14 Leo Spitzer, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony*, ed. Anna Granville Hatcher (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 5–6.

15 In »Über das vergleichende Sprachstudium,« Humboldt explains how feeling or mood determines how our mind (»*Gemüth*«) relates to language and by extension, to the world. Based on the emotional temper of our mind (»*Stimmung des Gemüths*«) we can treat words primarily as the mimetic representations of the sensory impressions created by objects of experience or as signs for abstract concepts (*Gesammelte Schriften* 4: 229). Since, as I will show, Humboldt believes that we need language to have experiences of objects in the world, he is in effect arguing that the temper of our mind determines how we interact with the world.

nature as an object. From the original opposition between the dialogue partners, the I and the You, arises the a new opposition to the grammatical third person which, according to Humboldt, is the place assigned to nature (7: 104). Since, as he tells us, we need language in order to take in nature, we experience nature by engaging in the dialogue with it (7: 186). When the individual speaks a language of a particular culture, she participates in its unique and ongoing production of nature. Through language, speakers learn to interpret the external world and to reflect on their intellectual responses to reality. Speaking encompasses silent thought in which we assign a word to an object: this act limits or determines (*beschränkt und bestimmt*) me because I am forced to use its particular lexical distinctions among objects and among inner states of mind (7: 64). For example, the English word »wood« can refer to the hard tissue of a tree or a small forest whereas the German term for wood »Holz« has only the first meaning. Humboldt asserts that when we begin to speak a language, we gradually become aware of the system of distinctions in the language as a whole. Participation in a language community results in learning how to differentiate aspects of the manifold within and of the manifold without.

Humboldt is implicitly saying that we experience nature as if it were a language. He states that external (*äußeren*) objects speak to all of our senses simultaneously, but confesses that he cannot explain how the impressions of our ears connect those objects with the inner activity of the mind (7: 75–6). His argument raises a series of questions that he does not address in detail in *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*. How is it possible for things to speak to us, or to use Humboldt's terms, how is it possible for external (*äußeren*) objects to articulate themselves (*sich äußern*)? If we cannot take this observation literally, how are we to make sense of it? Can we genuinely understand nature unless it possesses a quality that is compatible with human speech? And if so, what is this quality?

I propose that Fichte gives us a way of resolving these issues. In this context, we should remember that he asserts that the solicitation is the first representation of the I. The subject concludes that the solicitation came from an individual with a sensuous force, a force that can manifest itself as the voice that utters the solicitation or as the body whose motions constitute articulations. The bodily presence of that individual makes us cognizant of the divisibility of nature. Consequently, for both Humboldt and Fichte, nature emerges through the dialogue between two individuals.

The latter, as we have seen, defines the human body as a metonymy of nature. Hence, it is only fitting that in his *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, he explains how objects, not just human bodies, produce expressions (*Äußerungen*). Expressions are manifestations of causes or forces that appear in sensible form as properties. These properties enable us to differentiate the various objects in nature that constrain us.¹⁶ Like linguistic utterances, *Äußerungen* occur in an interactive web whose members are both mutually and temporally determined.¹⁷ The I apprehends the objects by ascribing a particular force to their expressions. In *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*, Humboldt does not use the term »*Kraftäußerung*« in relation to nature. But in his earlier essay on gender difference, he observes that the character of natural phenomena is determined by active forces which reveal themselves in the external expressions (*Äußerungen*) of objects.¹⁸ In his linguistic study, he does however attribute an expressive force to human subjects. Fichte identifies this force as thinking and willing and on this point, Humboldt agrees with him: »(a)ll intellectual progress can [...] only proceed from an internal emission of force (*Kraftäußerung*), and to that extent has always a hidden, and because it is autonomous, an inexplicable basis« (7: 26).

Consequently, Fichte's text enables us to discern two crucial aspects of language in its relationship to perception that inform *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues* even though Humboldt does not analyze them in depth. First, language constitutes subject-object relations as a dialogue between humans and nature. This is not to say that nature speaks a language. Rather, Humboldt is arguing that we think about nature by transforming its *Kraftäußerungen* that provoke feelings, as Fichte would have it, into a human speech. Second, language gives us a common medium for identifying different kinds of properties such as red (visual) and smooth (touch) to use the examples from *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*. If our intellectual faculties are to process an object, it must be connected to a word: otherwise our thinking will not gain clarity and our representa-

16 Johann Gottlieb Fichtes *sämtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte, 8 vols. (Berlin: Viet & Co., 1845–46), 2: 173

17 Ibid., 177. For an insightful analysis of Fichte's understanding of nature, see Reinhard Lauth, *Die transzendente Naturlehre Fichtes nach den Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1984).

18 Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1: 313.

tions will not become concepts (7: 53). We strive »to compare, separate and combine« the various characteristics of objects in »a more embracing unity,« and can accomplish this only through sound (7: 54). Sound deputizes the unity by becoming the bearer of all of the impressions that the object makes on our inner and outer sense. For this reason, the linguistic representation reproduces the object and the feeling evoked by it in a particular individual. The utterance unites the senses with mind and spontaneity with passivity as it implants elements of nature in us (7: 61). This is precisely what happens in conversation when, according to Humboldt, words of our interlocutors penetrate the self.

Because articulation is the externalized and sensibilized (*äußerlich*) form of our mental activity, language is a self-reverting medium of thought. When we designate an idea, sound returns to our ear and as a result, »our idea becomes transformed into a real objectivity without being deprived of subjectivity« (7: 55). By hearing ourselves think, we become what Fichte calls subject-objects.¹⁹ This returning sound is a representation that we gather with similar ones to form a »manifold unity« and in this manner, we form concepts from representations (7: 67).²⁰ Just as we join representations together to form concepts signified by words, we join words together in sentences to form a second higher unity (7: 143). It is in this context that Humboldt identifies the kind of language that enables humans to achieve the most intellectual progress. He argues that where the mind is unaccustomed to abstraction, it fuses discrete terms into compounds that resist a more precise distinction of their components. Those languages that are based on accretion or incorporation hinder human advancement because they lacked the right concept of the particular parts of speech when they were developing (7: 153). Humboldt believes that inflections, a system for marking every word as a specific part of speech, is best suited to work in concert with our faculties. Inflected languages divide the sentences or compounds into their individual parts and construct from them a new sentential unity (7: 143). This analysis has a creative foundation: Humboldt criticizes those languages that repeat standard formulas, thereby preventing their speakers from modifying forms in accordance

19 Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 101.

20 For an analysis of Humboldt's views on the role of language in cognition, see Michael Losonsky, introduction to *On Language* by Wilhelm von Humboldt, xvii.

with new or changing situations. This reconstruction of the sentence is analogous to Fichte's conception of the collaboration of the imagination with the faculty of judgment. The former creates wholes (the sentence) while the latter divides (the word). Along these lines, Humboldt explains that the inflection expresses a dual relationship among objects of intuition: the vividness of individual objects and their relationship to one another (7: 158).

Humboldt's conviction that this verbal expression is produced by »the most harmonious exertion« of our mental powers points to his thesis that inflected languages best enable human faculties to unfold freely and operate in concert. To be sure, all languages create objects by synthetically combining concepts with sounds. But this act, which he defines as spontaneous positing, occurs most distinctively in words derived from inflections and in sentence formation (7: 213). In other words, it is only in inflected (Indo-European) languages that spontaneous positing occurs at all levels of intellectual activity. There is, he suggests, a consonance within inflected languages that corresponds the consonance within the speakers mind. As previously noted, for Humboldt, the mind creates when it posits, »but by the same act opposes itself to the created, and allows this, as object to react back upon it« (7: 213). Humboldt is linking here the inflected sentence (*Satz*) as an act of positing (*Setzen*). More precisely, he is asserting that when we articulate inflected sentences, we become conscious of our own activity. Humboldt makes a similar point in his argument that the inflection arises from the *right recognition* of the intuited (7: 158; my emphasis). He is saying that we not only identify the proper relationship constituting an objects, we know that we have discerned it.

Consequently, Humboldt is describing a situation in which a thorough grasp of objects arises concomitantly with a reflexive self-awareness of the speaking subject. This state of affairs comes about in inflected languages because they establish the most complete accord between nature and human reason. It is at the highest level of intellectual activity that we discover order in the manifold forms of empirical reality: nature is a »colorful manifold, which, by all sensory impressions, consists of diverse forms [...] our reflections discover in nature a regularity that speaks to our mental form« (7: 61). The discovery of lawfulness among natural products is for Humboldt a linguistic act: »Aside from the bodily existence of things, their outlines are clothed [...] with external beauty, in which regularity and sensory material enter an alliance that remains inexplicable to us, in that we are

seized and carried away by it. We encounter all of this again in analogous echoes (*Anklänge*) in language, and language is able to depict it« (7: 61).

To say that the recognition of nature's regularity depends on transforming nature's language through the human voice is to describe reason as sensuous. He argues that the comprehension and pursuit of conceptual relationships follow »the change of sounds, or legislate for it in advance, and language thereby acquires a livelier clarity. A deficiency of sound-change impedes the auditory recognition (*wiedererkennen*) of the concepts designated (7: 71). Moreover, he observes that grammar arises from the congruence of sound forms with the laws of thinking (7: 157). He sees in the incorporeality of air the sensuous counterpart of the mind (7: 54). Sound is therefore the sensible manifestation of our logic and as such it constitutes the prism through which we reflect on the organization of our thoughts. He even argues that the musicality of language arises concomitantly with the abstraction from material objects: »[T]he more brightness and clarity the sense of language requires in depicting sensory objects, and the purer and less physically defined the determinacy it demands of mental concepts, the more sharply do articulated sounds also make their appearance, and the more sonorously do the syllables range themselves alongside each other to form words« (7: 91).

The tonal beauty of language is not only a reflection of nature's beauty: it is an aesthetic idea of reason, that is, it expresses the clarity of our thought. In keeping with his emphasis on the musicality of language, he stresses that if communities are to preserve the power of synthetic positing in their language, then word-unity, »under the influence of rhythm must possess the great firmness, factual denotation and relation must find a correctly ordered expression, and the sentence displays the separation of individual words« (7: 236). When we experience the beauty of language we are freed from our passive state of sensation, and we are consequently able to recognize how we give intellectual form (natural laws) to the sensuous material of nature. The musical aspect of language also enables us to observe the same form-giving process in language. Speech, the synthesis of sound and thought, is better suited to this task than thought by itself because articulated language gives us a »sense of something deeper than can be reached by mere analysis of thought, [...] the mutual relation between the mental and the sensuous, and finally a rhythmically melodic treatment of tone« (7: 238).

In conclusion, I wish to point out that for Humboldt and Fichte both, art is a paradigm of the productive power of individuals in the process of their self-realization. In the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte notes that the sculptor who makes a statue based on his aesthetic intention (goal) unites the theoretical and the practical. For Humboldt, as we have seen, thoughts formulated at the highest level of intellectual activity are works of lyric poetry, the literary genre closest to music. Though the discussion of art inevitably shifts our attention to the individual artist, we should recall that for both Fichte and Humboldt, the notion of the individual is inseparable from that of intersubjectivity. For Fichte, the ultimate foundation of the rational individual is a transcendent being, whereas Humboldt's concept of individuality is rooted in the history of the speaker's language community (FTP 352).²¹ Language producing activity works spontaneously in conversation partner and does so by transforming the linguistic signs that have been defined and reinterpreted through the productive activity of generations of speakers. The dialogue among speakers is a process of giving collective (communal) form to nature, a process that corresponds to Fichte's thesis that we realize ourselves as moral beings by reshaping nature to our ends. Fichte means nature as an empirical entity while Humboldt operates with a notion of ideational space. He speculates that we have a sense of an intellectual region that transcends language, but by the same token, language is the only means of exploring and fertilizing this area (7: 177–8.) The success of this endeavor depends on sensuous and technical improvements in language that render it capable of assimilating increasingly larger sections of the region. By venturing forth, speakers of a language community would then go beyond existing rhetorical commonplaces (*Gemeinplätze*).²² This argument echoes Humboldt's essay »Über die Ein-

21 As Zöller notes, the need to account for a first or unsolicited solicitor led Fichte to postulate the existence of a higher being. See Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy*, 120.

22 In the Western tradition, rhetorical commonplaces go back to classical antiquity where they were used to store and transmit knowledge. See Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967). Ong traces the decline of commonplaces back to innovations in scientific instruments and practices in the Renaissance which required painstaking recording of detail. Because the expanding body of knowledge could not be recorded with standard oral formulas, the rise of science was furthered by the newly emerging print culture in Europe (85). In his later research, Ong shows how the discursive practices of the

bildungskraft« where he observes that the poet is a traveler who leads readers into a new world, i.e. to a state of mind where they gain a new perspective on their image of nature.²³ Similarly, he notes in *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*, after a language has stopped developing new structures, poets and philosophers are the ones who change their culture's relationship to the world by enriching existing words with new and more intellectually sophisticated meanings (7: 93). His reference to poets and philosophers is consistent with his notion of musical thought. How Humboldt's concepts of harmony and ideational nature relate to social praxis is a question that awaits further analysis.

natural sciences influenced Romanticism. Like scientists, Romantic writers eschewed standard rhetorical formulas and valued innovation and novelty. See Walter J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology. Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), 260–83.

23 Wilhelm von Humboldt, »Über die Einbildungskraft,« in *Poesie und Einbildungskraft*, 133.

Fichte, Schleiermacher and W. von Humboldt on the Foundation of the University of Berlin

Claude Piché

In the following essay I would like to raise a question related to the creation of the University of Berlin in 1810. We know that Wilhelm von Humboldt was in charge of the project of this new university and that he asked many well-regarded intellectuals of his time to communicate to him their ideas on this matter. Among these intellectuals, Fichte and Schleiermacher wrote what might be considered the most important contributions. So my question in this context may seem quite narrow and secondary with regard to this whole enterprise. Nevertheless, it leads us to the heart of the debate that took place in the years preceding the opening of this new institution of higher learning. The question is: Why, according to Fichte, do the regular university students have to wear a uniform? A subsidiary question to this disciplinary measure is the following: Why does Schleiermacher take the exact opposite standpoint: a total freedom regarding the dress code?

We know that Schleiermacher had had the opportunity to read Fichte's proposal entitled *Deductive Plan of an institution of higher learning to be founded in Berlin* (1807).¹ So, when he submitted his proposal to Humboldt the year after, *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense*,²

- 1 Fichte, *Deducirter Plan einer zu Berlin zu errichtenden höheren Lehranstalt* [1807], in J. G. Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke* (Berlin: Veit & Comp, 1845/46), Book VIII, henceforth abbreviated as *Deducirter Plan*, pp. 95–204.
- 2 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten in deutschem Sinn*, in the same, *Texte zur Pädagogik I*, M. Winkler and J. Brachmann (eds) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 101–165 (henceforth abbreviated as *Gelegentliche Gedanken*); trans. T. N. Tice and E. Lawler, *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense* (Lewiston: Ed. Mellen Press, 1991).

his position on this particular point could be read as directly answering Fichte. But more important is the fact that the man in charge of »cult and education«³ at the ministry, Humboldt, ultimately took Schleiermacher's side, rejecting Fichte's *Plan*. To be sure, the question about the uniforms would remain secondary if it simply had to do with the university disciplinary code adopted in order to regulate students' way of life. But Humboldt's preference for Schleiermacher's project and for his stand on academic life in the new institution of higher learning has deeper theoretical motivations than might appear at first sight.

As a matter of fact, these motivations may be interpreted in political terms. This is the way the French Fichte scholars Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut characterize the stakes present in this debate. They see Fichte's conception of the university as »authoritarian«, whereas Schleiermacher's position, and by the same token Humboldt's, can be interpreted as »liberal.«⁴ This reading of the two conflicting positions in the debate is certainly correct but it spells out in political terms a disagreement that has profound philosophical roots. So it will not suffice to say, like Eduard Spranger does in his book *Über das Wesen der Universität*, that Fichte's advocacy of school uniforms simply expresses his admiration for the Prussian habits and usages.⁵ Certainly, Fichte stresses the importance of strict discipline among students, but he does not conceive university life in military terms. The students have a common goal but this goal has to do only with learning and nothing else. And because all regular students are assembled to attain this goal, they wear the uniform in order to show the external world that they are all exclusively devoted to it.

But if this attitude of Fichte has a philosophical ground, we can show that this is also true of his opponents Schleiermacher and Humboldt. This is precisely what will retain our attention here. In the first part of this paper, I will sketch the confrontation between Fichte and Humboldt concerning their basic conception of human beings and of their role in society. We will see that the texts in which they elaborate their own views on

3 *Die Universität Humboldt, Gestern-Heute-Morgen*, Gerhard Krüger et al. (eds) (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1960), p. 19.

4 Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, »Réflexions sur les théories de l'Université dans l'idéalisme allemand,« *Archives de Philosophie* 42 (1979): p. 70.

5 Eduard Spranger, »Einleitung«, *Über das Wesen der Universität* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1919), pp. XXIII, XXX.

the vocation of man also deal with the problem of education. In Humboldt this education takes the form of a specific process called *Bildung* which is accomplished by the individual for her own sake, whereas in Fichte the individual gradually raises herself to the level of science, and ultimately to the doctrine of science. In other words, if, for Humboldt, the pole of reference is the individual, who uses science in order to achieve her own fulfillment and unity, for Fichte, science is the main concern, insofar as it unites the individuals in the task of reaching the one and only truth. These two sets of philosophical premises will allow us, in the second part, to focus on a common theme, academic freedom, and to explain why Fichte and Schleiermacher (the latter having close affinities with Humboldt) choose different paths when they set out their views on the way life on the campus should be conceived in the new university. At the end of this paper, I would like to make few remarks on the Humboldt University. Although the institution in its historical form can be considered the »prototype of the modern university,« the feasibility of both models examined here has today become more and more problematic.⁶

1. *The Vocation of Man According to Fichte and Humboldt*

As surprising as it may sound, it is possible to say that the ultimate victory of the liberal view over the Fichtean conception of the new University of Berlin had been decided long before Schleiermacher and Fichte submitted their respective plans to the ministry. In fact, already in the early 1790s, Humboldt had written a manifesto in favour of liberalism with the title *Ideas for an Essay on the Limits of State Action*.⁷ This book, which was published posthumously, deals primarily with political theory, but the concept of *Bildung* is discussed quite extensively, along with Humboldt's views on the purpose of human beings in society. For Fichte's corresponding views, we could certainly turn to his 1800 book bearing the title *The Vocation of Man*, but the fact is that he had already expressed his ideas on this topic at

6 See Louis Dumont, *L'idéologie allemande* (Paris : Gallimard, 1991), pp. 163–164.

7 Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen* [1792] (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991), henceforth abbreviated as *Versuch*; trans. J. W. Burrow, *The Limits of State Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

the very beginning of his career in Jena. I am thinking here of his famous *Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar*, in which he explains the vocation of man in his role as a learned person. Only two years separate these lectures (given in 1794) from Humboldt's essay on liberalism, but, as we will see, there is an important theoretical, or better philosophical gap between the two positions. This gap will precisely determine Humboldt's decision taken almost twenty years later to reject Fichte's proposal for the University of Berlin.

In order to get straight to the point, let us concentrate on their conception of man in society. We might begin by quoting, one after the other, two short passages that show how strong a contrast there is between the two thinkers. The first one is taken from Humboldt's *Essay*: »The highest ideal [...] of the co-existence of human beings, seems to me to consist in the fact that each strives to develop himself from his own inmost nature, and for his own sake.«⁸

The other one is an excerpt from Fichte's second lecture, devoted to the vocation of man in society: »All of the individuals who belong to the human race differ among themselves. There is only one thing in which they are in complete agreement: their ultimate goal – perfection [...] the ultimate and highest goal of society is the complete unity and unanimity [*Einmüthigkeit*] of all of its members.«⁹

Obviously, the theme treated in both quotes is the same, but the direction taken by the two authors diverges in a radical manner. For Humboldt, the goal of life in society is entirely focused on the individual, for her own sake. The word *Bildung* used in this text does not merely mean education or formation. It should rather be translated as »self-formation«. It might seem strange, but the process of *Bildung* is the purpose, the ideal of life in society: each one has to see to one's own development. On the other hand, the Fichtean individual as it is presented here in relation to the ideal of humanity is required to develop herself in order to become identical to all other human beings. If Humboldt insists on the individual as an irreducible entity, Fichte, for his part, seems to ask that the individual give up her

8 Humboldt, *Versuch*, pp. 25–26; trans. (modified), p. 19.

9 Fichte, *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, SW VI, p. 310 (henceforth abbreviated as *Einige Vorlesungen*); trans. D. Breazeale, *Some Lectures concerning the Scholar's Vocation*, in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 159.

singularity and make herself, at least in the long run, identical to all the other human beings. If we wish to have a clearer picture of the reasons that will lead to the disagreement between Fichte and Humboldt concerning the concrete organization of the university, it might be useful to take a closer look at each of these early statements about the status of the individual, starting with Fichte.

To circumscribe the vocation of the human being in society, Fichte proceeds in two steps: first, he introduces the ideal of perfection which, as such, is unreachable; second, he draws attention to the task of infinite improvement which immediately mobilizes the efforts of the individual although, in the end, it is always the pure and unattainable ideal of perfection that must be aimed at. That is to say that this ideal of perfection, even if it is in principle out of reach, nevertheless remains decisive for Fichte because it indicates the ultimate goal that the individual, despite her finiteness, must attempt to attain. Here is a definition of this ideal of perfection: »Perfection is determined in only one respect: it is totally self-identical. If all men could be perfect, if they could all achieve their highest and final goal, then they would be totally equal [*völlig gleich*] to each other. They would constitute but one single subject.«¹⁰

As we can see, individuals have no value of their own in Fichte's view. Here instead they embody a particularity that must necessarily be overcome. All individuals as rational beings are endowed with an identical nature. Expressed in the words of the *Sittenlehre* (1798), within each person there is a pure I, to which each individual must try to model her own singular empirical I, even though this requires a long and patient quest for adequacy.¹¹ If all men could reabsorb their empirical into their pure I, they would all be identical and form a unique subject.

This brings us to the second step in Fichte's exposition, that is to the perfectibility with which finite beings must content themselves. Drawing on Kant's famous essay of 1784 on *Universal History*, Fichte states that the ultimate goal of humankind in history is the development of all of man's dispositions or talents. At first, one must admit that if a human being is considered strictly as a rational being, the presence of the individual disposi-

10 Fichte, *Einige Vorlesungen*, SW VI, p. 310; trans., p. 159.

11 Fichte, *System der Sittenlehre*, SW IV, p. 169.

tions does not prevent her from being like all the other persons. On the contrary, these dispositions being the same in everyone, they bring homogeneity among the individuals. »Since all talents have their foundation entirely within pure reason, they are all equal in themselves; therefore, they all ought to be cultivated in the same way – which is what is required by this demand. Equal results must always follow from the equal cultivation of equal talents. And thus we arrive by another route at the conclusion established in our last lecture: the final aim of all society is *the complete equality* [Gleichheit] *of all of its members.*«¹²

But immediately after this passage, Fichte goes on to claim that a human being is not only a rational being, that it is also sensible as a finite being on which the non-I, i.e. nature, exerts a decisive influence. Nature is an impediment to reason here in that it introduces a factor of »diversity«. If there are singular beings in the world, if there are individuals, it is essentially because nature introduces a differentiation that leads to the occurrence of the empirical I. This empirical I, therefore, does not develop all of its dispositions in an even manner, but only a few of them according to the particular environment in which nature has placed it. Fichte cannot ignore these elements of diversity. In the process of the gradual improvement of the individual, he is obliged to take it into account, so that he even urges each individual to develop precisely those dispositions that nature has awakened: »nature affects the human mind in a variety of different ways and never develops the mind's capacities and aptitudes in the same way twice.«¹³ This means that nature produces all the individual particularities so that the choice of the aptitudes that a person can decide to perfect is in the end quite limited, since they have been, so to speak, predetermined by nature. Consequently, an individual can never claim that she embodies the whole species in her own person.

As we can see, the only way for mankind to come to the full realization of its dispositions is through specialisation and division of labour. Each individual must develop her natural gifts and talents in a unilateral way. Fichte writes: »nature develops everyone one-sidedly.«¹⁴ This means that the individual is asked to concentrate on the specific dispositions that

12 Fichte, *Einige Vorlesungen*, SW VI, pp. 314–315; trans., p. 163.

13 Fichte, *Einige Vorlesungen*, SW VI, pp. 313, 314; trans., p. 162.

14 Fichte, *Einige Vorlesungen*, SW VI, p. 315; trans., p. 164.

nature has given rise to in herself and to renounce for herself to cultivate the other dimensions of humankind. She will take part in the totality of culture only when she receives from the others the results of their own particular talents, the fruit of their efforts.

It was foreseeable that Humboldt would take the exact opposite stand and warn us against the danger of a one-sided development of personality. He had clarified his own position even before he could read Fichte's lectures and the whole idea behind his concept of *Bildung* rests on the assumption that the individual human being must not be sacrificed for the sake of mankind considered as a whole. As we already noticed, *Bildung* means self-formation, or self-education, and in this case the individual does not have to put aside some aspects of her personality or to specialize in a specific field. On the contrary, *Bildung* aims at the full realization of the person. In fact, it is considered by Humboldt to be the ultimate ideal of humanity. »The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development [*Bildung*] of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom is the first and indispensable condition which the possibility of such a development [*Bildung*] presupposes; but there is besides another essential – intimately connected with freedom, it is true – a variety of situations.«¹⁵

This excerpt is very helpful for understanding the meaning of *Bildung*, in that it stresses from the start the difference with Fichte's conception of the individual's culture. In fact, *Bildung* is the harmonious and proportionate development of the faculties and propensities of a person rather than a selective development of the talents. *Bildung* must be proportionate, without any kind of atrophy. This is the reason why Humboldt uses the word totality to depict the individual involved in this process of formation. Her development is multilateral, and not one-sided, as is Fichte's case. This is why the excerpt stresses the fact that the individual must be exposed to a »multiplicity of situations.« In this case, multiplicity does not play the same role as the diversity alluded to by Fichte. If for the latter, diversity causes a fragmentation of humanity that can be superseded only at the price of an in-

15 Humboldt, *Versuch*, p. 22; trans., p. 16.

finite task, the multiplicity in question for Humboldt places the person in many different contexts leading to many different experiences, which are a very positive factor for the formation of this person. In other words, these various situations and encounters with others contribute to the extensive formation of a personality, in the same way an organism takes from its environment all the nutriments needed for its growth. We must admit that the organic metaphor is very frequently used in Humboldt's *Essay*, and for good reasons. The individual is considered to be a microcosm, a world in itself. The last point that has to be brought to our attention in the quoted passage deals with freedom. This is, as we all know, a central theme, if not the central topic, for German Idealism and it is no surprise to see it occurring in this context. On closer examination however, we notice that freedom is reduced to a mere »condition«, to a presupposition, although essential, for *Bildung*. It goes without saying that the process of self-formation presupposes freedom, but on the other hand we have already seen that this formation takes place for the individual's own sake. This comes as a very individualistic interpretation of the concept of autonomy that, since Kant, is at the basis of our understanding of freedom.

In order to capture the uniqueness of the individual that develops deliberately and methodically, Humboldt has recourse to the word *Eigentümlichkeit*, that we can translate as originality. Etymologically, the German noun *Eigen-tümlichkeit* already refers to something that belongs to the person »proper«, and to no one else. So we must be careful not to confuse *Eigentümlichkeit* with the Fichtean *Einseitigkeit*, i. e. with the one-sided culture of a person. In the following passage Humboldt makes this point very clear, as though he had, in 1792, anticipated the content of Fichte's *Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar*. »Every human being [...] can act with only one dominant faculty at a time [...] It would therefore seem to follow from this, that man is inevitably destined to a one-sided cultivation, [*Einseitigkeit*] since he enfeebles his energies by directing them into a multiplicity of objects. But man has it in his power to avoid this one-sidedness, by attempting to unite the distinct and generally separately exercised faculties of his nature.«¹⁶

16 Humboldt, *Versuch*, p. 22; trans. (modified), p. 16. For a similar passage in Schleiermacher, see his *Brouillon zur Ethik (1805/06)* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1981), p. 41. For a critique of one-sidedness, see also his *Gelegentliche Gedanken*, p. 113.

It becomes obvious that the individual is in no way condemned to use only a few of her powers in an isolated manner. She has the possibility of bringing them together and producing something new, something unique. But if Humboldt, while defending his concept of *Bildung*, warns us against the Fichtean danger of the overspecialization, he is also conscious of the fact that another danger lies in the opposite conception, i.e. the conception according to which humanity is equally present in every individual, as long as this humanity is reduced to its lowest common denominator. In other words, if the one-sidedness of culture must be avoided, the opposite tendency of homogenization must also be resisted. This danger is especially acute when the state starts to consider individuals exclusively as subjects or as mere citizens. The reduction of human beings to their political status produces what we might call homogenization of persons. No wonder that Humboldt fights this type of a perversity in an essay devoted to the »limits of the activity of the state«: »Like [*gleichförmige*] causes produce like effects; and hence, in proportion as State interference increases, the agents to which it is applied come to resemble each other, as do all the results of their activity.«¹⁷

Here, the liberal plea is directed against state interventionism in general, but in the following sections of his *Essay* Humboldt has the opportunity to specify his criticism. For instance, in chapter VI on education, he takes an unequivocal position in favour of the private system of education as opposed to the public system. According to him, everything that comes from the government inevitably tends to serve the purposes of the state and, in the present case, it tends to impose upon the schoolchildren a standardized education which, while keeping the people in a state of passivity and indifference, is an impediment to development of original personalities. This brings us to the second step of this presentation dealing with academic freedom.

2. *The lifestyle of the students in the new university*

To sum up the confrontation that I just exposed, one can say that Fichte remains within the framework of Kant's essay on *Universal History*, ac-

¹⁷ Humboldt, *Versuch*, p. 31; trans., p. 24.

according to which the goal of humanity can only be fulfilled at the level of the species, not of the individual, who is in a certain way sacrificed. On the other hand, Humboldt, with his cult of individuality, seems to be closer to Herder's historicism. It is perhaps not a mere coincidence that the word *Bildung* comes up as early as 1774 in the title of Herder's essay on the philosophy of history.¹⁸

If we now turn to Schleiermacher, whose precise description of the organization of the university was to receive Humboldt's assent, we find a criticism of Kant's abstract universalism, parallel to the one that we just showed in Humboldt. According to Schleiermacher, the Kantian moral theory is far too »juridical«. As a proponent of an »ethics of individuality,«¹⁹ Schleiermacher cannot admit that a single moral law could rule the conduct of each individual. This goes against the free development of a unique personality. It would be easy to show that in this Schleiermacher is under the influence of early German Romanticism, but it might suffice to say that from the beginning, Humboldt and Schleiermacher, because of their preference for individuality and originality, have very strong affinities and that they are ready to close the ranks against a philosophy that subsumes the singular under the universal without further consideration.

This is reflected in the conception of academic freedom that is put forward on each side, even though neither disagrees on every point. For instance, if we consider the question of academic freedom under two aspects, the freedom of the institution toward the external world and the freedom granted within the institution, then we must admit that all three thinkers share the same opinion on the first aspect. The point of agreement is the following: although the university is subsidised by the state, it must as far as possible remain free of any kind of governmental interference. Indeed, Humboldt, the liberal advocate of private education, will

18 Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*, in Herder's *Werke in Fünf Bänden*, Book V (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1978), pp. 39–137. See Louis Dumont, *L'idéologie allemande*, pp. 110–111; Theodore Ziolkowski, *Clio: The Romantic Muse. Historicizing the Faculties in Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 180–181.

19 Schleiermacher, *Monologen* [1800] (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1978), p. XVIII and p. 27; *Brouillon zur Ethik* (1805/06), p. VII and pp. 4, 47. See also Robert B. Loudon, »Introduction«, Schleiermacher, *Lectures on Philosophical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. XXI.

himself be led to compromise with the state on hiring university teachers, but the general principle of independence of the institution toward politics remains valid for him as much as for the others.²⁰ It is rather the second aspect of academic freedom that poses a problem, and this concerns the freedom not so much of the professors – who are allowed to choose the topics of their teaching, according to their research interests – as of the students. And this brings us back to the example that I mentioned at the very beginning, an example that has to do with student life at the university. The point in question is the following: Fichte in his *Plan* requires that the regular students wear a uniform, while Schleiermacher in his *Occasional Thoughts* not only allows students to wear whatever cloths they want, but accepts that they experiment with every possible way of dressing, be it highly eccentric and extravagant.

The fact that Schleiermacher, with the consent of Humboldt, encourages the students to develop their own personality not only through clothing but also in every aspect of their way of life is fully in accordance with his insistence in the *Occasional thoughts* on *Eigentümlichkeit*, on originality.²¹ But we know that this stress on uniqueness is part of the concept of *Bildung*, which is opposed to any kind of levelling of individuals. To be sure, the lifestyle of the students is just an aspect of the broad problem of education and of *Bildung*, but it illustrates clearly the stakes at hand. The years spent at the university coincide with a very specific phase in the life of a person: at school the person, as a mere pupil, had to obey, and later in her professional life the individual will have to comply with a set of customs that will impose a certain kind of conformism upon her. In this phase of adulthood, it will be too late to question the relevance of these social conventions. According to Schleiermacher, this is precisely the university students' privilege. Since they are not yet engaged in a profession, they have the opportunity to get to know themselves better, to let their own

20 Humboldt, *Versuch*, p. 72; trans., p. 52; the same, *Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin* (1809–1810), in Ernest Anrich (ed.), *Die Idee der deutschen Universität* (Darmstadt: Hermann Genter Verlag, 1956), pp. 380, 385 (henceforth abbreviated as *Organisation*). See also Eduard Spranger, *Über das Wesen der Universität*, p. XXII.

21 The chapter under consideration here is entitled »On the usages and customs at the university, and on surveillance«, Schleiermacher, *Gelegentliche Gedanken*, pp. 148–159.

personality come to a full bloom and to invent new ways of living. This is the profound reason for Schleiermacher's attitude toward the marginal lifestyle of the students, an attitude that can at first sight appear like sheer libertarianism.

So if we consider closely his disagreement with Fichte on this point, Schleiermacher does not oppose him because he dislikes uniforms, but more radically because he refuses any kind of uniformity among individuals, and even more so when this uniformity is imposed upon them by the civil society or the state. In English, uniform and uniformity have exactly the same etymology and the construction of the German adjective *ein-förmig* used by Schleiermacher is strictly equivalent. This is also true of the closely related term *Gleichförmigkeit* used in the following passage. »When this freedom is formed [*sich bildet*] by itself in such a way that it becomes part of the innermost spirit of the university; when the multiplicity [*Man-nigfaltigkeit*] and the originality [*Eigentümlichkeit*] of the lifestyles become all the more prominent that in the other strands of society uniformity [*Gleichförmigkeit*] and lack of character [*Charakterlosigkeit*] come to the fore: then this freedom seems to be a beneficial counterweight to which we should not oppose unless we have the best reasons to do so.«²²

As becomes obvious, this academic freedom for the students, which seems at first glance to leave the door open to all kinds of disorder, is in the end a very salutary principle that is expected to have a most positive influence on the evolution of society in general.

We know that Fichte takes the opposite stand and that he intends to introduce a discipline based on rules and sanctions into the institution of higher learning.²³ To him, these measures only serve the purpose of allow-

22 Schleiermacher, *Gelegentliche Gedanken*, pp. 153–154. For the concept of *Eigentümlichkeit* see also his *Monologen*, p. 31 and *Brouillon zur Ethik* (1805/06), pp. 13, 16.

23 I do not want to argue here that there is no place at all for »originality« in Fichte. If we take into account, for instance, the *Anweisung* of 1806, we know that he distinguishes between a »lower« and a »higher« morality. In the latter case, the individual elevates herself to a superior level of freedom at which her creativity is called upon in order to intervene efficiently in specific contexts of action. The lower morality, on the other hand, has the status of a preliminary condition for the higher one. In fact, it corresponds to the level of Kantian ethics and its moral law, which is considered to be mainly prohibitive: it simply tells which maxims have to be rejected. Now, Fichte insists that the prohibitions of the lower morality must be scrupulously observed before one can even think of acceding to the more creative aspects of the

ing serious students to fulfill their duty without being bothered. They should all pursue this common goal and therefore Fichte can claim that there has to be a »fusion of the learning persons [*Lehrling*].«²⁴ Schleiermacher would certainly disagree with two elements in this phrase. First, there is no use of speaking of a fusion [*Verschmelzung*] in the case of students, because in the liberal view everyone is entitled to develop her own personality in a particular way. Second, Fichte speaks of the students as *Lehrlinge*, in the sense that they are at the university to be taught something, i.e. a doctrine that already exists. Ultimately for Fichte the highest possible knowledge lies, as we know, in his own doctrine of science. So this means that the student has to raise herself to the level of this higher knowledge. To be sure, this is not possible without an intense activity on the part of the student, but the path that she must follow is already known to the professor. This is the reason why Fichte praises dialog between the professor and the students in the form of a Socratic conversation. The problem is that this kind of conversation is not a dialog in which both partners are equal: the teacher always knows best.²⁵

Hence, it is obvious why Fichte, unlike Schleiermacher, does not speak in his *Plan* of »seminars« for the most advanced students at the university.²⁶ This can be easily explained. For Schleiermacher, the university is not a place where the students »learn« but rather an environment where they are invited to develop knowledge and to do science. As a matter of fact, theoretical knowledge or science in general has a direct impact on the moral development of a person, but whereas in Fichte the individual learns science, in Schleiermacher and Humboldt it develops itself as a personality by taking an active part in the process of scientific discovery. This means that even though they know less than the professor, students are nevertheless young researchers whose role must be acknowledged. Because each

higher morals. In view of this, the liberal model of originality would appear to Fichte to rely on the kind of freedom proper to free will or *Willkür*, which, in the end, amounts to self-assertion. This can be exemplified by Schleiermacher's overly tolerant attitude towards students' fighting in duels: for Fichte, duelling must be from the start strictly forbidden for reasons drawn from the lower morality.

²⁴ Fichte, *Deducirter Plan*, SW VIII, p. 114.

²⁵ Fichte, *Deducirter Plan*, SW VIII, pp. 104–105. See also his *Ideen für die innere Organisation der Universität Erlangen* (1805/06), SW XI, p. 280–281.

²⁶ We must keep in mind however that Fichte's text remained unfinished.

particular individual has something unique, she can make an invaluable and irreplaceable contribution to the progress of science.²⁷ For the liberal view, the student is conceived as a personality who is in the process of reaching her full extension. Therefore, the university must provide her with all the resources among which she will choose the elements that best suit her needs.

In my concluding remarks, I do not wish to stress the obvious fact that the Humboldt University does not correspond anymore to the concrete reality of today's institutions of higher learning. In fact, if the basic assumption underlying both models examined here is the independence and autonomy of the university toward civil society, this condition is certainly not met, were it only because of the tremendous pressure exerted by the economic system on our institutions.

But the question concerning the relevance and the feasibility of these two models can also be dealt with from the strict point of view of science. Namely, when we consider how the different sciences have evolved, we have to admit that they represent a serious challenge to both models. Let us take Fichte, for instance. It has been mentioned at the beginning that the way he conceives the inner organisation of the university can be characterized as ›authoritarian‹. Now this is true not only of the discipline that he imposes on the campus, but also of the way he confers on philosophy a dominant role among all other sciences. It might be reminded that in the *Programmschrift* of 1794, Fichte described the doctrine of science as a »science of the sciences in general«. This conception of philosophy as providing each particular science with its own basic principle is still present in Fichte's project of 1807 and he actually intends to implement it in the organisation of the university, although he knows very well that he will meet

27 Humboldt, *Organisation*, p. 378 : »Das Verhältnis zwischen Lehrer und Schüler wird daher durchaus ein anderes als vorher. Der erstere ist nicht für die letzteren, beide sind für die Wissenschaft da; sein Geschäft hängt mit an ihrer Gegenwart und würde, ohne sie, nicht gleich glücklich von statten gehen; er würde, wenn sie sich nicht von selbst um ihn versammelten, sie aufsuchen, um seinem Ziele näher zu kommen durch die Verbindung der geübten, aber eben darum auch leichter einseitigen und schon weniger lebhaften Kraft mit der schwächeren und noch parteiloser nach allen Richtungen mutig hinstrebenden.«

with some resistance from the scientists.²⁸ In fact, in the course of modern age, the particular sciences have gradually become emancipated from the tutelage of philosophy. They have developed according to their own specific laws and procedures, without any need of a philosophical foundation.

This phenomenon can be characterized with the term *Eigengesetzlichkeit* coined by Max Weber: this autonomy of the particular sciences has become more and more obvious, especially during the 19th century. In such a context, it seems illusory to believe that philosophy is still suited to play a unifying and founding role for these scientific disciplines. Max Weber himself was rather sceptical about the attempts of his neo-Kantian fellows to establish a theory of knowledge. And more recently, Richard Rorty in his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*²⁹ has proposed a similar line of argument against all attempts (neo-Kantian or others) to promote philosophy as epistemology. One thing is certain, contemporary universities do not rely on philosophy, and the demands for an authentic organic unity of all the sciences has been more or less abandoned.

If we now turn to the liberal model of university, we face a similar problem because of the very nature of science. Assuming that the individual has to realise her *Bildung* by coming into contact with different scientific disciplines in order to gather the knowledge required by her specific needs, it is hard to imagine how a unified and coherent personality could result from these different scientific discourses and practices. The inner logic that is constitutive of each science is not likely to be found in the other scientific discourses. In the absence of a ›unified science‹, the individual has to try to reconcile those logics and it is not clear that they will lead to a consistent whole, and thus contribute to the harmonious and proportionate development of the individual. It is not obvious that science conceived in this sense can help the individual to realise a higher concept of humanity. The individual is more likely to experience what Georg Simmel called the ›tragedy of culture‹.³⁰ By this expression, he meant that modern subjectivity is torn between the many objectifications of culture, and in this case between the truth claims of each science. In such a situation, it is not easy to conceive how knowledge could make human beings

28 Fichte, *Deducirter Plan*, SW VIII, p. 125.

29 Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

30 Georg Simmel, »Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur,« [1911] in the same *Philosophische Kultur* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1983), pp. 183–206.

morally better. Yet this thesis according to which *Wissenschaft* leads to morality is an assumption shared by both parties in this debate.³¹

31 For a more detailed discussion of the arguments developed in this essay, see my »Fichte, Schleiermacher et W. von Humboldt. Sur la création de l'Université de Berlin,« in Miklos Vetö (ed.), *Historia philosophiae. Hommage à Alexis Philonenko* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2007), pp. 117–141.